

THE AMERICAN WOMAN IN SEARCH OF  
HER INDEPENDENCE AS REPRESENTED IN  
THE NOVEL FROM 1870 TO THE 1930'S

by

SARAH WINGATE TAYL



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Thesis

THE AMERICAN WOMAN IN SEARCH OF HER INDEPENDENCE  
AS REPRESENTED IN THE NOVEL FROM  
1870 TO THE 1930'S

by

Sarah Wingate Taylor

(A.B., Smith College, 1928)  
submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
1944







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Friendship: "I don't want to teach, I want to

learn, and above all, I want to know what I'm doing."

Harry James.



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## ABSTRACT

The break-up of the Victorian world affords women, particularly in the New World geared to the future, an opportunity hitherto unrealized to explore the possibilities of their individual nature. The American women novelists from 1870 forward reflect the trend of the movement, while the conflict of the formalized Victorian scheme with the iconoclastic modern provides unique dramatic background.

Mrs. Stowe in "Pink and White Tyranny" published in 1871, starts the ball rolling toward emancipation of women from the Victorian trivialities in which they had been educated as their properly limited sphere, appealing directly to the women, not taking the more obvious course of attacking men as women's oppressors. She aims her fire especially against the petty egoism of the spoiled belle, society's useless darling.

In 1888 occurs the first great intellectual explosion from the new generation of American women novelists, with the appearance of Amelie Rives' "The Quick or the Dead?", Gertrude Atherton's "What Dreams May Come", and Laura Daintrey's "Eros". These novels provide a vital picture of the ferment of the moment, expressing the Victorian love of histrionics, the fervent addiction to passion and sensuous beauty, and in the case of "Eros" especially, a challenge to established moral conventions.



# ABSTRACT

The break-up of the Victorian world offered women, particularly in the New World, an opportunity to express their individuality. The American women novelists from 1820 forward reflect the trend of the movement, while the conflict of the formalized Victorian scheme with the individualistic modern provides unique dramatic background.

Mrs. Stone in "Rich and White Tyranny" published in 1871, states the half century toward emancipation of women from the Victorian idealism in which they had been educated as their property limited sphere, appealing directly to the woman, not taking the more obvious course of attacking men as women's oppressors. She aims her fire especially against the party system of the spoiled belle, society's useless darling. In 1898 comes the first great individualist explosion from the new generation of American women novelists, with the "quest" of Annie Rivers, "The Quaker or the Healer", Gertrude Atherton's "What Dreams May Come", and Emma Reinecke's "Honor". These novels provide a vital picture of the ferment of the new era, expressing the Victorian love of idealism, the ferment of rebellion to passion and sensual beauty, and in the case of "Honor" especially, a challenge to established moral conventions.



Laura Jean Libbey touches the high point of melodrama, offering an avid public the excitement actuality never embraces, and likewise providing a safety valve for an emotional era which insisted upon confining its emotions within a strait-jacket of studied decorum. Miss Libbey is in a different category from the foregoing novelists, for her appeal is avowedly to the people, the average, uncultivated readers who might still in those formative days of American democracy be designated as the lower middle class.

The problem of the woman deliberately educated to know nothing of life, and yet expected suddenly to emerge a mature and informed guardian of society upon her marriage, is keenly analysed by Edith Wharton in "The Age of Innocence". The experience and spiritual depth of the woman exposed to European culture serves as a point of contrast to show up the deficiencies in woman's education so carefully fostered by the Victorian scheme in the United States.

The intolerable conditions of women's economic nonentity and the precarious position of women's moral integrity due to the fact they had no financial independence, are thoroughly aired in the case of Lily Bart of "The House of Mirth" published in 1905. The finer qualities of the aesthetic and social ideal of the belle are well personified in Lily who is tragically sacrificed to material circumstance. This book is a penetrating summary of a turning point in the struggle of American women to achieve recognition as individual beings.



James Jean Libbey touches the high point of melodrama, offering an vivid public the excitement actually never experienced, and likewise providing a safety valve for an emotional era which insisted upon containing its passions within a strict-jacket of studied decorum. Miss Libbey is in a different category from the foregoing novelists, for her appeal is avowedly to the people, the average, undifferentiated readers who might wish to share formative days of American democracy as depicted on the lower plains.

The pathos of the woman deliberately added to her nothing of life, and yet extended suddenly to evoke a nature and to formed creation of reality upon her marriage, is keenly emphasized by Edith Wharton in "The Age of Innocence". The expectations and spiritual depth of the woman exposed to European culture never as a point of contrast to show up the deficiencies in woman's situation as carefully fostered by the Victorian system in the United States.

The intellectual condition of woman's economic necessity and the prevailing position of woman's moral integrity are to the fact that had no financial independence, she thoroughly understood in the case of Lily Bart of "The House of Mirth" published in 1905. The first qualities of the aesthetic and social ideal of the belle are well personified in Lily who is practically sacrificed to material circumstances. This book is a masterpiece of a turning point in the struggle of American women to achieve recognition as individual beings.



Ellen Glasgow, writing as a Southerner during the post-Civil War depression, lashes out against the shams of glorious appearances, valiantly insisting upon facing reality squarely, however unpalatable. The heroic courage of certain of Miss Glasgow's women is not slighted,-- they are credited with genuine nobility in their efforts to salvage some beauty from sordid facts,-- but it is revealed as a nobility built upon the sands of illusion. Especially are the rationalizations of the Victorian double standard of morality exposed to devastating irony. In "The Romantic Comedians" Miss Glasgow covers the gamut of the ideal types of womanhood favored by three successive generations, the queenly Victorian type, the vivacious, irrepressible egotistical flapper, and the qualities more admired today in the woman who realizes herself through the tender ministrations of service.

Gertrude Atherton becomes the apostle of freedom for the woman's mind. Beginning early, before the turn of the century, and speaking from the dynamic western frontiers of the land, Mrs. Atherton presents especially in her protagonist, Patience Sparhawk, the multiple problems confronting a young woman at that transitional period. The impossibility of a satisfying relationship based on physical magnetism alone, the demand for mental companionship and economic recognition, are the main theses of "Patience Sparhawk and Her Times", a book which embraces more than any other single volume the various dilemmas involved in the break-up of the Victorian woman's world.



Miss Glasgow, writing as a Southerner during the post-Civil War depression, looked out against the storm of glorious hopes, valiantly insisting upon being morally superior, but over unyielding. The heroic courage of certain of Miss Glasgow's women is not denied. -- They are credited with genuine nobility in their efforts to salvage what they could salvage. -- but it is revealed as a nobility built upon the sands of illusion. Especially are the idealizations of the Victorian female standard of morality exposed as degenerating forces. In "The Economic Question," Miss Glasgow covers the ground of the ideal type of womanhood revered by those progressive writers, the purely Victorian type, the virtuous, industrious, economical type, and the qualities have a little today in the woman who makes herself through the laborious ministrations of service.

Glorious fiction becomes the agent of freedom for the woman's mind. Beginning early, before the turn of the century, and spreading from the dynamic western frontiers of the land, Mrs. Atkinson presents especially in her protagonists, Fanny Sparhawk, the multiple problems confronting a young woman as that transitional period. The impossibility of a satisfactory relationship based on physical attraction alone, the demand for mental companionship and economic recognition, are the main themes of "Fanny Sparhawk and Her Times", a book which cannot only give any other single volume the various dilemmas involved in the breaking of the Victorian woman's world.



The plea for individual intellectual development of the woman is carried to its ultimate conclusion in "Black Oxen", published in 1923. Here Mrs. Atherton plays with the hypothesis that physical rejuvenation may be achieved scientifically, permitting an informed mind and experienced personality to enjoy the vigor of youth. The conclusions are damaging to that favorite illusion of the race, that happiness consists largely, if not exclusively, in romantic love; rather, Mrs. Atherton's protagonist, the Countess Zattiany, is convinced, the fullest realization of life consists in the exercise of power, dismissing love as barely more than a mirage contrived by nature to delude the generations into perpetuating themselves. Mrs. Atherton offers the most extreme of all pleas for the enjoyment of intellect.

In conclusion: the Victorian and post-Victorian women novelists in the United States present an extraordinarily vital sequence of the development of the woman's consciousness under the stimulating and enfranchising conditions of the New World. It is possible that the sequence will continue, since the search for the most satisfying values appears to be bound up with life itself, and peculiarly with the woman's temperament. The most favorable conditions for dramatic portrayal, however, may well have been the happy lot of the novelists who appeared at the moment the strictly conventionalized and idealistic Victorian scheme was breaking up: the modern versus Victorian conflict of human aspiration toward freedom and a better order



The plea for individual intellectual development of the woman is carried to its ultimate conclusion in "Black Girl", published in 1928. Here Mrs. Assheton plays with the hypothesis that physical rejuvenation may be achieved scientifically, permitting an informed mind and experienced personality to enjoy the vigor of youth. The conclusions are startling: that favorite illusion of the race, that lagging sentimentality, is not exclusively, in romantic love; rather, Mrs. Assheton's protagonists, the Countess Estling, are convinced that the full realization of life consists in the exercise of power, dominating forces more than a single conceived by nature to divide the generations into perpetuating themselves. Mrs. Assheton offers the most extreme of all plans for the enjoyment of intellect.

In conclusion: the Victorian and post-Victorian women novelists in the United States present an extraordinarily vital response of the development of the woman's consciousness under the stimulating and enervating conditions of the New World. It is possible that the response will continue, since the control for the most satisfying living appears to be bound up with life itself, and particularly with the woman's development. The most favorable conditions for creative personality, however, may well have been the happy lot of the novelists who emerged at the moment the status was complicated and idealized. Victorian science was breaking up the modern versus Victorian conflict of human civilization toward freedom and a better order.



provides a most fruitful field for dramatic presentation of immemorial issues. The women novelists embraced in this survey, due to the very strictures of their time, had abundant wealth of material to deal in, and will remain in our literary and social history as masterful chroniclers of a singularly creative period. In time they may serve as models for a later era which has shattered most of the recognized objectives and complex values of tradition, yet, finding itself restive and disillusioned, seeks once again a refinement of discipline integrated toward a common purpose, toward great social and spiritual ideals.



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## CHAPTER I

If men have been proverbially unable to understand women, they at least have not been alone in their predicament. For women in the last seventy years or so have been giving a great deal of attention to trying to understand themselves. It is to be supposed that they had no time to give to the problem earlier, or possibly failed to receive the necessary encouragement for such a difficult task. From our enlightened view in the mid-twentieth century, it will easily be conceded that some benefits accrue from somebody's having a glimmering of understanding on the subject. And if any women can be found who are keen and candid enough to help the rest of us along, they should be given every encouragement.

Seventy years ago the United States was still a new land, offering the highest challenge to the adventurous whether in the material or the imponderable sphere. And with the forward movement, necessarily all sorts of conventional trammels adapted to a static scheme were tossed aside. It happened at the same moment that throughout the civilized world a diffused spirit of humanitarianism, of concern for the cause of the oppressed of every kind, came awake. Women felt themselves oppressed, and given their new freedom in the western world they began







most eloquently and effectively to plead their cause. What they discovered about themselves and what new light they were able to cast upon the problems of this mystified race, have been dramatically recorded by the American women novelists, observing, leading or following each move in an extraordinarily vital progress.

From the Victorian Age to the present has been a transition fraught with anguish. Prior to the break-up of the Victorian world, it would appear to be possible to trace some stabilizing continuity from age to age, the more violent contrasts emerging only at respectful distances. But the passage from the Victorian to the modern occurred under a painful acceleration, to the extent that two generations living at the same time confronted each other over an abyss of misunderstanding. However brave the front the new world put on, it would be folly to suppose that bewilderment and dismay were the Victorian share alone. There have been confidence and optimism among the apostles of the modern and the future, but there has been, too, the disorientation which is inevitably the part of those who reject an inherited deposit of experience. It is not always so much fun to be young, and especially disinherited, for all that the heritage may have been angrily repudiated.

We are still very proud today of being anti-Victorian, and, I insist, we are still very much bewildered, not only because the world is in flames, but because we have no sure idea of how to use our new or recovered freedoms once the conflagration



most eloquently and effectively to place their cases. What they discussed about themselves and what was right they were able to base upon the problems of this particular case, have been dramatically responded by the American way of thinking, leading or following each case in an extraordinary way.

From the Victorian Age to the present has been a transition towards a new world. It would appear to be possible to have some stability in continuing from the old, the more violent movements are arising only as respectful distances. But the passage from the Victorian to the modern occurred under a painful association, to the extent that two generations living at the same time confronted each other over an abyss of misunderstanding. However, there is from the new world not only, it would be fair to suppose that development and change were the Victorian alone. There have been contradictions and oppositions among the values of the modern and the Victorian, but there has been, too, the disintegration which is inevitably the part of those who reject an inherited deposit of experience. It is not enough to much for the young, and especially the old, that the old ways may have been angrily repudiated. We are still very much today of being anti-Victorian, and I think, we are still very much bolstered, not only because the world is in chaos, but because we have no new idea of how to use our new or recovered freedom once the confusion



is over. There is much talk about maladjustment, which one amateur psychologist would like to define nine times out of ten as disorientation. The maladjusted do not understand where they came from or where they want to go. Therefore it is suggested that there is no better way to master such confusion than to take stock of the immediate past in order to understand how and why we arrived at this special moment, and how to proceed therefrom. Any history within a hundred years is still current history, however radical the contrasts within that period, for all exist within the interdependent relationship of action and reaction.

Clearly, then, it is unfortunate that those who are young with the consciousness of the present should dismiss the world of their grandmothers as of no special consequence to themselves. Clearly, too, it would require a degree of persuasiveness to convince each generation, having spent a fair amount of its adolescent energy in breaking the chains of the past, that its very repudiation is a chain of no mean calibre. Today the most notable reaction to the customs and mental attitudes of seventy years ago is a laugh. "But what," asks Mrs. Upchurch, that shrewd woman of the double-exposure vision in "The Romantic Comedians"\*, "could be more deplorable than the swiftness with which the high tragedy of one generation declines into the low comedy of the next?" -- Grandmothers, it seems, are forever old-fashioned.

\*"The Romantic Comedians", by Ellen Glasgow. Doubleday, Page & Company. New York 1926. p. 288.







Yet each of those absurd Victorian poses which awaken our mirth was grounded in motivation, which, without sympathy, we shall never understand. There is extensive and treacherous ground before us. We must divest ourselves insofar as possible of the particular myopia of the moment. It cannot be done completely, but to recognize the existence of the perpetual blind-spot of the ephemeral instant is in a measure to neutralize it. Nothing is more enduring, nor more deceptive, than the illusion of modernity. Most sobering of all is the fact that while contrasts exist, the cycle does appear to go round and round.

The temper of any age is pervasive: it affects manners, morals, architecture, dress, interior decoration, all the arts, among which I would like to list sex specifically. Superficially the Victorian Age progressed in a pageantesque display of the grand manner. Among the cultivated, who after all were the articulate of that day and through whose eyes we must witness the spectacle, life was performed through the medium of gesture heavily weighted with significance. They used their eyes, their arms, their posture, in a fashion completely rejected by us, as a formal code of deliberate expressiveness. They were in daily life, I do believe, the most dramatic of all periods in the Anglo-Saxon world, excepting possibly the Elizabethans. Yet since they played so studiously for effect, conveyed more in manner than in substance, they have left us the least sound deposit of drama in recorded plays.

Conversely the Victorians have left us melodrama so extra-



Yet each of these shared Victorian poses which were in our  
which was presented in various ways, without exception, we  
shall never understand. There is an entire and passionate  
ground before us. We must almost ourselves become as possible  
of the historical aspects of the moment. It cannot be done  
physically, but to recognize the existence of the physical thing-  
ness of the moment, that is in a measure to understand it.  
Nothing is more certain, not more decisive, than the physical  
of modernity. Now, nothing of all this that will be  
more certain, the whole does appear to be round and round.  
The history of my age is a history of its own nature, of its  
moral, intellectual, moral, intellectual, moral, intellectual, all the same,  
though which I would like to look and especially. Intellectual-  
ally the Victorian age presented in a particular history of  
the great moment. Among the intellectual, who are all the same  
application of the history and through these are the same things  
the history, it is not possible to find the history of the  
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gant that unless one can grasp the style through even the slightest contact in experience, one will be unable to credit the hyperbolic histrionics of that day. It is inconceivable to us that such could exist and be taken seriously-- it is utterly beyond our sympathetic grasp unless we have seen some relics of that style. Even now, if we watch, it may not be altogether too late to glimpse a flamboyant, laboriously dramatized personality, living now in flesh and time but not at this moment of actuality, perpetrating through an amazing hangover the studied effect of the Victorian conception of life. Such an experience is worth cherishing, for without it I maintain the living contact between the generations is lost. Without it, Victorian research becomes antiquarianism uninformed with the warm touch of vital understanding. At this moment we can still revive the people of our grandmothers' days to a semblance of their living selves. A little later, and they may be glorified into all sorts of engaging portraits-- the cycle is due to take that turn, believe me! But they will be portraits, not people, then.

The Victorians in the United States as in England lifted their thoughts to a lofty eminence and clung grimly to the radiant vision of those chosen heights regardless of what the land at their feet exhibited. So stubborn were they, that the less reality reenforced them in the image of what life should be, the more tenacious their grasp on what they thought it ought to be, and their insistence upon pretending that it was.







They were idealists and they were aesthetes, firm in refusing to mention the disturbing facts of life. We think that they shrank from them, meanwhile congratulating ourselves upon our superior courage. To some extent our position may be justified, and yet in fairness we should allow for the possibility that it may have been less timidity than an informed distaste which prompted their attitude. Would-be aristocrats, as the bourgeois are, they clung heroically to a high standard of conduct, not invariably attained but as a standard unassailable. If the inner structure of things might be mean and unlovely, at least they would emphasize an elegant facade.

We are rabid democrats, conceding, however lamely, that what everybody does goes. We stress the functional, we shriek the facts of life, we deal in stark understatement. In everything we are their antithesis-- possibly not, I submit, because we are right, but because they existed. Because they carried their scheme of things to its ultimate possibility and the reductio ad absurdum of all extremes stared the rising generation in the face, we have angrily repudiated their order, bag and baggage. Prompted by an extreme, we have been extreme in our reaction.

During the last seventy years in the United States we have still been proceeding on the assumption that here mankind could make a new and better world. What is more, women for the first time in the history of the race have taken unto themselves by and large the right to express their view, to have a direct







hand in building this better order. An unprecedented social revolution has resulted, and the human drama expressed in the process has been of unique value. Barely informed at first as to the instrument which was their own mind, the protagonists of the woman's movement must look both inward and outward, must wrestle with facts and with fictions no less stubborn than the facts. Hitherto, throughout the extensive history of the race, women could be classified as a relationship rather than as individuals, to borrow Willa Cather's definition of old Mrs. Harris.\* This part of the story, so weighted with heroism and inestimable social significance, well told as it is in the portraits of early New England and pioneer women done by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Willa Cather and Mary Ellen Chase, I have omitted with reluctance, but necessarily. Our particular study is of the women who have been most conscious of their new opportunities as individuals in a land geared to the future. Over and above the pervasive influence of existing in other people's lives, we shall see women emerging into a concrete social force, most of all into self-assured personalities.

Few lands have been so uncharted, few expeditions have proven so full of warm human experience ranging all along the line from the ludicrous to the tragic as the candid commentary provided by three quarters of a century of American women novelists

\* "Obscure Destinies" by Willa Cather. Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1932.







blazing out undiscovered or unadmitted possibilities in feminine nature-- vividly demonstrating the American woman in search of herself.

Meanwhile, as we move forward with our grandmothers, and experience, as I hope we shall, the tensions and bewilderments of their special problems, let us constantly keep in mind the wise and saving humor of these words of Gertrude Atherton in "Patience Sparhawk and Her Times"\*, written in 1897: "Woman is a strange and complex instrument. She is as she is made, and it is not well to condemn her even after elaborate analysis."

\*"Patience Sparhawk and Her Times" by Gertrude Atherton. John Lane: The Bodley Head, New York and London 1897. p. 341.



starting out, unobserved or unacknowledged possibilities in "anti-  
the spirit" - vividly demonstrating the complex woman in action  
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Meanwhile, as we have learned without grandiose, and at-  
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of this social problem, I am constantly kept in mind the  
time and saving factor of these words at Gertrude's attention in  
"Feminine Mysticism and the Future", written in 1934: "Woman  
is a struggle and complex instrument. She is an end in itself,  
and it is not well to condemn her even after elaborate analysis."



## CHAPTER II

Nearly twenty years after the publication of "Uncle Tom's Cabin", Harriet Beecher Stowe brought out another crusading volume in a cause quite as dear to the humanitarian nineteenth century as the cause of the negro, i.e., the emancipation of women. Unlike its distinguished predecessor, "Pink and White Tyranny",\* published in 1871, is today a forgotten book, except for those with very long memories. Such memories exist, however, and one young woman-- young then, that is,-- remembers being rebuked by her blue-stockings aunt for poring again and again over the volume. It seems there must have been something in it to attract the young, and indeed upon examination "Pink and White Tyranny" proves to be a spicy bit of moralizing temptingly gotten up to intrigue the young ladies whom the earnest reformer intended to lead into loftier paths. Curiously, there seems not much choice between the style of Laura Jean Libbey, that taudry siren of novel readers some twenty to forty years later, and of the worthy author of this determined blast in the interests of elevating her sex. Mrs. Stowe has altered her style from the sonorous, well-rounded periods of "Old<sup>town</sup> Folks", appearing only two years earlier,-- and this for a def-

\*"Pink and White Tyranny", A Society Novel, by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Roberts Brothers. Boston 1871.







inite purpose. Women, being human, must be interested and allured before they could be reformed.

The book opens under the chapter heading, "Falling in Love", with a dazzling damsel beflounced and beribboned, armed with parasol and fan, a bewitching ostrich feather hat perched above her flowing-- rather disorderly-- locks; all this done in pen and ink drawing between the title and the text which gets under way as follows:

"Who is that beautiful creature?" said John Seymour, as a light, sylph-like form tripped up the steps of the verandah of the hotel where he was lounging away his summer vacation. "That! Why, don't you know, man? That is the celebrated, the divine Lillie Ellis, the most adroit 'fisher of men' that has been seen in our days." (p.1)

Note immediately the element of danger, as sweet to the Victorian nostril as catnip to a cat. Note the "divine", and the elegant ease of the lounging young man-- and you are off to a good start in your Victorian travels. As Mrs. Stowe observes elsewhere in this volume, "a thorough-paced naturalist can reconstruct a whole animal from one specimen bone." So by selecting and digesting an excerpt here and there, we shall work ourselves into the proper temper to feel the situation as it then existed, to grasp the vital issues, and feel as the people of that time felt the resistance of the status quo to new solutions of the old problems.

Now back to the romantic interest:

"By George, but she's pretty, though!" said John, following with enchanted eyes the distant motions of the sylphide.







The vision that he saw was of a delicate little fairy form; a complexion of pearly white, with a cheek the hue of shell pink; a fair, sweet, infantine face surrounded by a fleecy radiance of soft golden hair. The vision appeared to float in some white gauzy robes; and, when she spoke or smiled, what an innocent, fresh, untouched, unspoiled look there was upon the face! John gazed, and thought of all sorts of poetical similes: of a 'daisy just wet with morning dew;' of a 'violet by a mossy stone;' in short, of all the things that poets have made and provided for the use of young gentlemen in the way of falling in love. (p.2)

Now this John Seymour was a model young man, and if it were not for making Mrs. Stowe do all the work for me, I should much prefer to let her go on telling the whole story. Suffice it to report that he was as "good and honest a man" as could be found, "generous, just, manly, religious", and "heir to a large, solid property", besides being a cultured man of the law in his own right. Furthermore he is three and thirty years old and still a bachelor, content with a congenial, capable sister to preside over his household. Nonetheless, John had romantic inclinations in the form of a dream-wife, "not at all like his sister." Immediately this sister begins to loom on the horizon as a dangerous complication, "the best and noblest woman that could possibly be", but still a complication. Even as we are being introduced to one type of woman in Lillie Ellis, note the saving, if less alluring contrast in her diametric opposite:

His sister was all plain prose-- good, strong, earnest, respectable prose. He could read English history with her, talk accounts and business with her, discuss politics with her, and valued her opinions on all these topics as much as that of any man of his acquaintance. But with the visionary Mrs. John Seymour aforesaid, he never seemed to himself to be either



The vision that he saw was of a delicate little girl, with a complexion as white as milk, and a smile that was like a ray of light. She was dressed in a simple, white dress, and she was looking at him with a gaze that was full of love and devotion. He felt that he had found the one person who was truly his, and he was determined to spend the rest of his life with her. The vision disappeared, and he was left with a sense of longing and a desire to find her again.

Now this John Brown was a noble young man, and it is worth noting for the sake of the world to all the work for me, I should wish to see him as often as I could. He was a man of great energy and determination, and he was always ready to take on any task that was set before him. He was a man who was not afraid of hard work, and he was always willing to sacrifice for the good of his country. He was a man who was truly a hero, and he was a man who was loved by all who knew him. It is a pity that he is no longer with us, but his memory lives on in the hearts of all who remember him.

The vision was all plain prose - good, strong, earnest, and true. It was a vision that was full of life and hope, and it was a vision that was truly a blessing. It was a vision that was a gift from God, and it was a vision that was a source of strength and courage. It was a vision that was a light in the darkness, and it was a vision that was a beacon of hope. It was a vision that was a true and lasting legacy, and it was a vision that was a source of inspiration for all who follow in the footsteps of the man who saw it.



reading history or settling accounts, or talking politics; he was off with her in some sort of enchanted cloudland of happiness, where she was all to him, and he to her . . . (p.4)

It sounds very nice, you must admit, that "enchanted cloudland of happiness", and Mrs. Stowe is not underestimating the power of its attraction. Its magnetic effect on John at least was as rapid as it was devastating:

When he saw this distant vision of airy gauzes, of pearly whiteness, of sea-shell pink, of infantine smiles, and waving, golden curls, he stood up with a shy desire to approach the wonderful creature, and yet with a sort of embarrassed feeling of being very awkward and clumsy. (p.6)

The stage is now set and the characters are on, the conflict already suggested, while we attend eagerly to the progress of this invariably interesting pursuit. The complex problem of who is doing the pursuing and who, finally, the capturing, eludes the obvious categories . . .

You need not be told what happens, surely. John was hopelessly befuddled and taken in by this enchanting creature who, in wicked secretiveness, smoked, painted, flirted promiscuously and lied about her age, enjoying actually some twenty-seven experienced years instead of the guileless twenty she affirmed. She was a horrid, selfish, spoiled little gold-digger who didn't love John at all, who indeed did not know how to love, but craved only petting like a cat. She was shallow-souled and shallow-brained, a designing exhibitionist whose one aim in life was to array herself for admiration. Well, there are others like her? Oh yes, dear reader, but Harriet Beecher







Stowe is not slumming in feminine nature just to show how trivial an individual woman can be and how destructive-- examples of which types we find in literature a-plenty today. Rather is Mrs. Stowe holding up to our startled attention a dominant type which she insists has been carefully, nay lovingly fostered, and with the noblest intentions:

The daughter and flower of the Christian civilization of the nineteenth century, and the kind of woman that, on the whole, men of quite distinguished sense have been fond of choosing for their wives, and will go on seeking to the end of the chapter.  
(pp. 51-2)

Alas, Harriet, that even at the beginning of your crusade, you should have been burdened with such disheartening clarity of vision! But the theme of this book is predominantly the emancipation of women, not of men. And the author proceeds with the fiery courage of invective, until, presumably, she does succeed in knocking off a few chains.

Clearly, the emancipation of women seen from the close range this book affords is not the simple problem of setting free a rebellious creature sure of her thwarted powers, cramped, and determined to be no longer cramped, under the blustering dominance of the male. Rather here we have a woman attacking not the brutality or refined selfishness of the masculine half of creation-- though some protest along this line may be seen later from other sources-- but the false conception of women about women, about their capacities and their role in life. Chivalrously enough, in the Latin manner, Andre Maurois credits



There is no doubt in my mind that the  
 fact of industrialism can be and has been  
 which began to find its literature in the  
 Mrs. Jones holding up to our children a picture of  
 which the future has been painted, my lovely friends,  
 with the highest intention

The language and figures of the Christian religion in the  
 religious history, and the kind of woman that, in the whole  
 can of course be applied to the whole of the world  
 their view, and will be an answer to the end of the chapter.

And, finally, that even at the beginning of the world  
 you should have been brought into such interesting places  
 of vision. But the state of this book is probably the  
 explanation of some, not of others. And the author probably  
 with the story of the world, with, possibly, the  
 does not see in the history of the world.

Clearly, the explanation of some, not of others, is  
 this book should be not the state of the world, but  
 religious history and of the history of the world, and  
 according to be no longer enough, under the history of the  
 end of the world. What have we seen a world of the world  
 the world, or rather the world of the world, the world of  
 world--the world of the world of the world, the world of the world  
 John, the world of the world, the world of the world of the world  
 about which, about which, about which, about which, about which, about which  
 Christianity, in the world, in the world, in the world, in the world, in the world



us women in America up to 1918 in having "successfully undertaken to refine the ways of the pioneers".<sup>\*</sup> No doubt women were, and always will be hopefully reforming men in one way or another; that is the obvious direction their energies should take. But our theme here is not simple, not obvious, indeed quite the reverse. It takes a woman to catch a woman, and apparently Harriet Beecher Stowe believes it takes a woman to educate, reform, emancipate her benighted sisterhood. -- The material she produces is weighted with consequence.

The age of Lillie Ellis is the age of the belle regnant, a highly specialized Victorian type; while the role of Lillie Ellis was the cherished ambition of every young girl's heart. Society combined in creating just such a burden for itself, and the men who were destined to suffer from her existence had a heavy share in bringing it about. With a satirical edge to her style which from now on quite sets Mrs. Stowe apart from any invidious comparison with Miss Libbey, our anxious educator surveys the causes at work:

Pretty girls, unless they have wise mothers, are more educated by the opposite sex than by their own. Put them where you will, there is always some man busying himself in their instruction; and the burden of the masculine teaching is generally about the same, and might be stereotyped as follows: 'You don't need to be or do anything. Your business is life is to look pretty, and amuse us. You don't need to study: you know all by nature that a woman need to know. You are, by virtue of being a pretty woman, superior to any thing we can teach you; and we wouldn't, for the world, have you any thing but what you are.' . . . (Occasionally these mentors) advised just a little reading, -- enough to enable her to carry on conversation

\*"The Seven Faces of Love" by Andre Maurois, translated from the French by Haakon M. Chevalier. Didier, N. Y., 1944. p. 242.



is women in America up to 1918 in having "successfully" undertaken to reverse the ways of the pioneers. No doubt women were, and always will be, naturally returning men in one way or another; that is the obvious direction their energies should take. But one theme here is not simple, not obvious, indeed quite the reverse. It takes a woman to catch a woman, and apparently Harriet Beecher Stowe believed it takes a woman to educate, reform, emancipate her benighted sisterhood. -- The material and emotional is weighted with consequence. The age of Lillie Ellis is the age of the belle remnant, a highly specialized Victorian type; while the role of Lillie Ellis was the cherished ambition of every young girl's heart. Society combined in creating just such a burden for itself, and the men who were destined to suffer from her existence had a heavy share in bringing it about. With a satirical edge to her style which from now on quite sets Mrs. Stowe apart from any inviolable comparison with Miss Libbey, our anxious educator surveys the scenes at work:

Pretty girls, unless they have wise mothers, are more educated by the opposite sex than by their own. For them where you will, there is always some man paying himself in their instruction; and the burden of the masculine teaching is generally about the same, and might be almost worded as follows: "You don't need to be so busy. Your business is life, is it? Look pretty, and amuse us. You don't need to study; you know all by nature that a woman need be known. You are, by virtue of being a pretty woman, superior to any thing we can teach you and we wouldn't, for the world, have you any thing and what you are." (Occasionally these men are) admitted into a little reading, -- enough to enable her to carry on conversation

"The Seven Years of Love" by Andrew Marshall, translated from the French by Rachel M. Chevalier. Diller, N. Y., 1944. P. 324.



but no sort of need of being either profound or accurate in these matters, as the mistakes of a pretty woman had a grace of their own. (pp. 47-8)

Such patronizing indulgence may have been pleasant enough provided you were one of those women who do occasionally occur, burdened with an intelligence not far removed from the pekinese. But what words can be found to express the hideous dilemma of a woman with even an average amount of mentality and initiative? Such atrocious prescriptions, elevated to a requirement of social success or even the minimum of social acceptance, can breed all kinds of horrors. And it had bred them, or this established emancipator would not have endorsed their existence with such serious consideration.

Society was exacting and society was cruel;

A petted child runs a great risk, if it ever is to outgrow childhood; but a pet woman is a perpetual child. The pet woman of society is everybody's toy. Everybody looks at her, admires her, praises and flatters her, stirs her up to play off her little airs and graces for their entertainment; and passes on. (P. 49)

If such was the ruling idea of what a woman should be, and she lent herself pliantly to the part, then in sum it appeared to mark the limitations of her nature. Short of the valiant rebel, the majority would be convinced that the desirable sphere for a woman was within this painfully silly business of being pretty and amusing. Oh yes, she had to suffer for it, because Mrs. Stowe is writing a tale with a moral attached. The vivid presentation of the type, however, serves to touch off our imagination to conceive how intolerably warping this



But no sort of need of being at their disposal or at  
their disposal, as the nature of a person's work has  
been of their own. (pp. 17-18)

Such personal intelligence may have been abundant enough  
provided you were one of those women who do occasionally occur,  
furnished with an intelligence not far removed from the business.  
But what words can be found to express the hidden depths of a  
woman with even an average amount of mentality and intellect?  
Such emotional profundity, elevated to a level of  
social wisdom or even the wisdom of social experience, can  
be found all kinds of things. And it had been there, or this out-  
standing investigator would not have expressed their experience  
with such various considerations.

Society was crowded and mostly was crowded;

A person could find a great deal of it even in an obscure  
city. But a person in a particular city. The great  
thing is that it is everywhere. Everywhere it is  
absolutely not. Everywhere it is. Everywhere it is  
of the same kind and kind as the other. Everywhere it is  
person on. (p. 19)

It was the feeling that it was a woman should be, and  
the first herself gently to the fact, that in it was it  
to have the limitations of her nature. Most of the world  
rebel, the society would be determined that the world  
where the woman was with this personality and intellect  
of many power and reason. On the one hand, she had to be  
it, because the woman is with a soul attached.  
The vast population of the world, however, never to touch  
all our imagination to sensitive how intensely saying this



sort of competition must have been, whether for those who were trying to be what they were not endowed for, or of attempting to hold up their end when what charms they had began to fade. This was an extraordinarily artificial world, and the maintenance of artifice can be a wearing process. Victorian women are notorious for "nerves".

As for the men, in certain aspects the situation could not have been altogether disagreeable. It must have catered to the masculine complacency, since clearly there could have been no disturbing intellectual competition. But, on the other hand, in the harsh light of the facts, men had to live with these women. It is John Seymour in this story who bears the terrible consequences of his gullibility. "The very idea of a wife," John is convinced, "is somebody to sympathize in your tastes." (p. 38). Blind, trusting, egotistical man! At first he sees Lillie as "just a dear, gentle, little confiding creature . . . delicate . . . one of the dependent sort." (pp. 36-7).

This lovely bit of pink and white; this downy, gauzy, airy little elf; this creature, so slim and slender and unsubstantial,-- surely he need have no fear that he could not control and manage her? Oh, no! He imagined her melting, like a moonbeam into all sorts of sweet compliances, becoming an image and reflection of his own better self. (p. 61)

Though Nature has set the seal of sovereignty on man, in broad shoulders and bushy beard; though he fortify and encase himself in rough overcoats and heavy boots, and walk with a dashing air, and whistle like a freeman, we all know it is not an easy thing to wage warfare with a pretty little creature in lace cap and tiny slippers, who has a faculty of looking very pensive and grieved, and making up a sad little mouth, as if her heart were breaking. (pp. 157-8)



...of the... must have been... for those who were  
...to what they were not... to be...  
...to hold up their end when... they had... to do.  
...This was an extraordinarily... and the...  
...most of... can be a...  
...and... for...

As for the... in... the... could not  
...have given... It was... to  
...the... then...  
...no... but, on the other hand,  
...in the... of the... and to have...  
...It is... in this... the...  
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Women are called ivy; and the ivy has a hundred little fingers in every inch of its length, that strike at every flaw and crack and weak place in the strong wall they mean to overgrow . . . (p. 84)

"Women are called ivy." Note that phrase well, girls. They -- we-- were called ivy, and since that was the character assigned to them-- to us-- we played the part to the limit, even if not in the tender fashion expected. The power of an ideal, constantly insinuated into the mind, so dominates the imagination of any period that human nature will conform, no matter what contortions it must go through to effect it. To be sure, if the pattern of required action is too far removed from the paths of commonsense, there may be a ferocious reaction . . .

Indeed Lillie was no fool, she knew what she wanted and she knew how to get it. She could play the martyr with most convincing subtlety, managing by little patient ways to convey that she was being bored into a decline by the tiresome provincial life of Springdale; she could summon "sick headaches, nervousness, debility, presentiments, fears, horrors, and all sorts of imaginary and real diseases"; what is more, the author concedes Lillie actually could make herself ill by trying, or thinking, hard enough! Naturally, in time, she is sent off to recover her health and spirits most expensively at Newport, and with some danger of compromising the fair name of Mrs. John Seymour. The author makes it perfectly clear that Lillie has her wits about her, and if she were a man in the business world her capacity to see through "to the tough material core







of things" would be generally recognized; in fact she would be respected as "one who had cut her eye teeth."

The crux of the problem, as already indicated, is who will win out in this pitched battle of wills, the supposed lord and master, or that clinging little delicate, dependent, docile, submissive creature, his wife? Mrs. Stowe at least has no illusions:

In this sort of interior warfare the woman has generally the best of it. When it comes to the science of annoyance, commend us to the lovely sex! Their methods have a finesse, a suppleness, a universal adaptability, that does them infinite credit; and man, with all his strength and his majesty, and his commanding talent, is about as well off as a buffalo or a bison against ~~at~~ a tiny, rainbow-winged gnat or mosquito, who bites, sings and stings everywhere at once, with an infinite grace and facility. (p. 206)

It begins to be apparent that our large-hearted, strong-minded emancipator is rabid on the theme of the dependent woman. Endowed with the zeal of a crusader in a needed cause, she is in a position to wield the weapon of her observations. In an age when appearance was everything and illusions were cherished because they were pretty, Mrs. Stowe proceeds to rend the veil of the pretty-pretty, as few men are capable of doing where women are concerned, and bares the terrific if subtle power of the "helpless" Victorian woman. Such power, based on false assumptions and directed to no good end, becomes an unhealthy rococo growth, unhealthy for the woman who wields it; unhealthy for the man who must endure it, and very unhealthy for the children. Mrs. Stowe writes as one who is







determined to see the end of it, and since it has arrived at its elaborate culmination-- how indeed could it go further-- we may believe that the literary emancipator of the negro had her full share in the emancipation of women from much Victorian vapidty. Be assured, the book, due both to the eminence of its author and to the timeliness of its theme, was widely read; it created a furore of interest and debate, and sowed the seeds of reform as only satire true to the object can reform. The lovely "martyrs" will be less flamboyant in their methods after this. This particular type of "woman enthroned" has achieved her moment of triumph, and henceforth will have to take to cover-- though never to extinction, one suspects.

Before we leave Lillie to the touching pathos of her end, when, reduced to invalidism she achieves a larger view of life, "feels the coming in of a soul" and the conviction that she and John will "meet in some better place hereafter", we might well cast a glance at some of the values tangled up with her existence. The worship of Lillie as an ideal type was all mixed up with Victorian religiosity. John saw Lillie as "an angel", "a saint", he was acutely aware of her suffering in the meek ways of the "martyrs". The theme is thoroughly developed:

Before his marriage, John had always had the idea that pretty, affectionate little women were religious and self-denying at heart, as matters of course. No matter through what labyrinths of fashionable follies and dissipation they had been wandering, still a talent for saintship was lying dormant in their natures, which it needed only the touch of love to develop. The wings of the angel were always concealed under the fashionable attire of the belle, and would unfold themselves when the hour came . . . . Though hers was a face so fair and pure that, when he first knew her, it suggest-







ed ideas of prayer, and communion with angels, yet he could not disguise from himself that, in all near acquaintance with her, she had proved to be most remarkably 'of the earth, earthy.'  
(p. 75)

And at the Sunday School party, this being one of John's annual benefactions, which with great difficulty he persuades Lillie to attend, she

was the image of patient endurance, trying to be pleased; and John thought her, as she sat and did nothing, more of a saint than Rose and Grace, who were laboriously sorting books, and gather<sup>ed</sup> around them large classes of factory boys, to whom they talked with an exhausted devotedness. (p. 90)

What has happened to saints, angels and martyrs in the years following this mistakenly worshipful era is not far to seek, nor why. Since Lillie was so ardently and naively canonized, martyred and garbed in angelic regalia, the bitter disgust that accompanies her debunking sweeps out all her trappings with her. Out go the saints, martyrs, angels as so many taudry fakirs; a monstrously confused association of ideas, to be sure, but once associated the logic is inexorable. Lillie proved an expensive luxury, not only at the peak of her career, but for long after, paid for in the anguished soul-searchings of those disoriented Victorians stricken on the one side by the attacks of materialistic science and on the other by the betrayal of such "angels" as they had believed were visible to the human eye.

Mrs. Stowe has presented her case against Lillie Ellis, and the verdict we may conclude, in view of the aftermath, was guilty. Lillie must hang for her sins; society will have no







more of her. But our author means to build, not only to destroy. Lillie Ellis was not the only type of American woman living at the time, despite the fact she was the cynosure of all eyes. This was the age of the blue-stocking as well as the belle, and doubtless the blue-stocking appeared all the more formidable and unlovely by very reason of the belle's existence. Grace Seymour, the foil for Lillie, might have saved her infatuated brother from his prolonged suffering as Lillie's husband if he had had the ears to hear. The author does not attempt to soften the contrast. Grace "was all plain prose, -- good strong, earnest, respectable prose", and yet because she is sound she possesses "a terrible sort of clairvoyance" making her "sensitive to any thing unreal or untrue."

Grace was one of those women formed under the kindly severe discipline of Puritan New England, to act not from blind impulse or instinct, but from high principle. The habit of self-examination and self-inspection, for which the religious teaching of New England has been peculiar, produced a race of women who rose superior to those mere feminine caprices and impulses which often hurry very generous and kindly natured persons into ungenerous and dishonourable conduct. (p. 146)

Granted, Grace will beguile none of us into virtue or wisdom, but she serves as the point of contrast by which to instruct Lillie in some wholesome truths. For Lillie, it is by now obvious, needed instruction on almost every score, and for all that the instruction is presented in the direct method, we today can at least grasp the necessity of something of the sort. Lillie was a dangerously anti-social being, she was an extravagant parasite draining off essential juices from the



some of her. But our author seems to build, not only on the fact  
that this was not the only type of American woman living at  
the time, but also the fact she was the opposite of all women.  
This was the age of the blue-stocking as well as the belle,  
and doubtless the blue-stocking appeared all the more formidable  
and utterly in very reason of the belle's existence. These  
systems, she felt for Lillie, might have saved her from  
brother than she preferred entering as Lillie's husband if he  
had had the sense to wait. The author does not say so.  
often the contrast. These "was all plain prose" -- good enough.  
earnest, responsible prose", and yet because she is aware of  
possessed "a feminine sort of clairvoyance" making her "seem-  
ing to say things which are untrue."

There was one of those women formed under the kindly stars  
of England, of whom New England is not so proud. The world of  
the belle, the high principle, the high principle, the world of  
self-sacrifice and self-denial, for which the religious  
teaching of New England has been peculiar. produced a sort of  
woman who was superior to those who had been spoiled and  
spoiled which often carry very generous and kindly feelings  
persons into egotism and all the other things.

Granted, these will be the kind of us into which we wish  
not the world at the point of entrance by which we live.  
Lillie in such a position. For Lillie, it is by now  
obvious, needed instruction on almost every point, and for all  
that the instruction is presented in the first manner, so  
that she at least grasp the necessity of something of the  
sort. Lillie was a dangerously anti-social being, she was  
entirely ignorant of the things of the world.



social system for the mere sake of her luxurious being. Many of her kind thought they were happy in being what they were, in existing simply to be petted and admired. But there were others who were unhappy and restless, though caught in the mainstream of what was expected of them. Some of these, like Nora in Ibsen's "Doll's House", were beginning to cast off the role of the man's plaything. There is a pathetic urgency behind Mrs. Stowe's instruction to these women. Lillie, she writes:

and many other women, suppose that they love their husbands, when, unfortunately, they have not the beginning of an idea what love is. Let me explain it to you, my dear lady. Loving to be admired by a man, loving to be petted by him, loving to be caressed by him, and loving to be praised by him, is not loving a man. All these may be when a woman has no power of loving at all,-- they may all be simply because she loves herself, and loves to be flattered, praised, caressed, coaxed; as a cat likes to be coaxed and stroked, and fed with cream, and have a warm corner.

But all this is not love. It may exist, to be sure, where there is love; it generally does. But it may also exist where there is no love. Love, my dear ladies, is self-sacrifice; it is a life out of self and in another. Its very essence is the preferring of the comfort, the ease, the wishes of another to one's own, for the love we bear them. Love is giving, and not receiving. Love is not a sheet of blotting-paper or a sponge, sucking in every thing to itself. . . . You may lose the very power of it by smothering it under a load of early self-indulgence. . . . you may lose the power of loving nobly and worthily, and become a mere sheet of blotting-paper all your life. (pp. 127-9)

Clearly, there must have been something off balance in an age which required such emphatic statements on an obvious issue. I am not anxious to leap to conclusions, but the cumulative evidence here raises a question: was this a day of blind egoism on all sides? Had human nature, already old



social system for the sake of the individual being  
of her. But though they were happy in being that way, in  
existing ability to be passed and admitted. But they were  
others who were unhappy and restless, though they in the  
existence of what was expected of them. Some of these, like  
hers in her "Bell's House", were beginning to rest off the  
role of the man's thinking. There is a restricted way in  
him. Some's inclination to the woman. Little, the  
written.

and many other cases, suggest that they have their  
when, unfortunately, they have not the beginning of an idea  
that love is. Let me explain it to you. If you love  
to be satisfied by a man, loving to be passed by him, loving to  
be satisfied by him, and loving to be passed by him, not  
loving a man. All these may be when a woman has no power of  
loving at all. — They may all be things because they love  
love, and love to be satisfied, and love to be passed, and  
as a girl, love to be passed and admired, and love to be  
and love a man's power.  
But all this is not love. It may exist, to be sure, where  
there is love. It is generally good. But it is not love.  
where there is no love. Love, we have learned, is self-  
less. It is a little bit of self and its neighbor. It is  
of another to one's own. It is the love we have for  
others. And not necessarily. Love is not a sort of clinging-  
to a thing, whether it is a person or a thing. It is  
love, love, the very power of it, by which it is  
hard to love self-interest. You may love the power  
of love, and yet not love. Love is a very kind of thing.  
Love is all your life. (p. 127-2)

Clearly, there must have been something off behind in an  
one which required such explicit statements on all obvious  
levels. I am not anxious to keep it confidential, but the  
conclusive evidence here raises a question: was this a day of  
blind vision on all sides? Had human nature, already old



enough to have gleaned wisdom from experience, at this point in its "progress" closed in so disastrously on itself? We have seen that John, for all his vaunted virtues-- he passes scatheless except for his credulity-- expected Lillie to be only a reflection of himself, her main function simply to sympathize in his tastes. There was no conception on the man's part of exchange, of individuality or legitimate requirements in the other person. His egoism was matched only by Lillie's. As for evidence outside the scope of this material, there stands the proverbial "Way of All Flesh" by Samuel Butler, presenting a scorching diatribe against the consuming selfishness of the Victorian parent: the child existed only to reflect, to serve, to gratify his elders. Small wonder, then, if the Victorian Age exploded!

And fervent thanks to Mrs. Stowe for having lighted such a potent little fuse in her "Pink and White Tyranny"!



appears to have seemed almost too important, at this point  
in the "process" aimed to be drastically to result in two  
even that John, for all his limited vision--as person and as  
last among the his present--is exposed still to be only a  
reflection of himself, but with function only to reproduce  
in his action. There was no suggestion on the part of  
exchange, of individuality or relative representation in the  
other person. His action was merely only of himself. As  
for witness within the scope of this material, there stands  
the proposed "Way of the World" by General Butler, presenting  
a sporting attitude against the commonest relations of the  
Victorian period: the child obliged only to believe, to know,  
to really, the others. Such wonder, then, is the Victorian  
his position.  
And there stands to him, then for having looked such a  
poor little thing in her "skin and white stockings!"



## CHAPTER III

It was as late as 1916 that Agnes Repplier noted "the present regrettable popularity of the Seven Deadly Sins".\* I confess that I am at a loss to understand why Miss Repplier, usually a person of keen distinctions, should so localize interest in sin. Just as long as any branch of conduct is recognized as something one should not indulge in, offering a choice range of esoteric experience, it is bound to exert a special appeal. While that one particular variety of the Seven which hurdles the barriers set around sex, has immemorably beckoned as something well worth trying. There have always been some who take the hurdle, and many, many others who talk about those who do.-- No doubt Miss Repplier was writing at a moment when the interest had become particularly vocal.

Over that long posthumous period when the tearing down of the Victorian super-structure occurred and the rather less lofty and elegant scaffoldings were laid bare, the charge of Victorian hypocrisy was very articulate. Oh yes, they paid lip service to religion, lip-service to morality, but, sneered their disillusioned descendants, look at what they did when they were

\* "The Repeal of Reticence" in "Counter-Currents" by Agnes Repplier. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston and New York 1916.



CHAPTER III

It was as late as 1915 that Angus Haggler posed "the ques-  
tion of the possibility of the Seven Deadly Sins." I can-  
not say that I am at a loss to understand why Miss Haggler, hav-  
ing a person of such distinction, should so foolishly in-  
quire in this. Just as long as any branch of conduct is recognized  
as something one should not indulge in, offering a choice  
of possible expedients, it is bound to exert a special appeal.  
While this one particular variety of the Seven Deadly Sins  
the writers are aware of, and have accordingly handled as  
something well worth trying. There have always been those  
who are fond of the thing, and many, many others who talk about those  
who do. -- To doubt that Haggler was writing of a subject when  
she intended her readers to participate would  
be a very long, needless period when the feeling about the  
subject is not shared and the reader is left  
and the subject is not shared and the reader is left  
hypocritical and very foolish. On the other hand, the  
to religion, the service to society, the service to the  
illuminated themselves, look at what they did when they were

a "The Seven Deadly Sins" in "The Seven Deadly Sins" by Angus Haggler. Boston and New York 1915.



not on parade! Indeed the Victorians had exalted notions of propriety, their code was elaborate and exacting. Yet always, it seems, those who set the standard of duty and decorum sternly high-- human nature being what it is-- are bound to cast a wistful and fascinated eye in the direction of easy delights. There are no known exceptions to this deplorable tendency short of the tepid at one extreme and the saints at the other, while the Victorians, if we may believe the records, produced few of either kind.

The technique of arousing sex interest is clearly a relative matter. Some periods appear to demand strong meat, and others, for reasons of their own which we should not be too quick to judge, call for a delicate touch. We have seen that that "adroit fisher of men", Lillie Ellis, was intriguing enough to hold the rapt attention of the young miss growing up in the 1870's. The fact that Lillie smoked, painted and carried on dangerous flirtations at Newport in the absence of her husband was sufficient to imply a great deal more. Decent women did not smoke, did not paint and certainly did not flirt dangerously at Newport. What more could the lively imagination ask? If these matters appear trivial and tame to us it is because we are differently conditioned; indeed we have become so hardened to meeting the actual physiology of sex with violent ramifications and abnormalities of any and all varieties starkly exposed on the printed page, that we may well need to become sensitized again to an issue whose full realization exists quite as much in the healthy resiliency of the mind as in the







body's action. It is possible to repress and it is also possible to over-stimulate.

Victorian convention decreed that a single field of activity was open to women, that of marriage and domesticity. Startling realizations hang upon this one feature of the social order then obtaining. That half of the world's energy was focused in such a single channel without other recognized outlet is not conducive to the conclusion that sex was a neglected issue. Given the situation, the existence of a formal code of evasions and restrictions might more plausibly be interpreted as a frantic effort to keep the structure of society within some sort of livable system rather than as a luxury for the mere sake of pleasant appearances and praiseworthy "respectability". Restrictions connote a fear of the thing restricted. Evasions imply the reverse of ignorance of the thing evaded: one's eye is on it all the time. Freud, after all, is a Victorian product. Freud is no accident in time.

All of which would seem to point to the interesting probability that sex, instead of being subordinate-- subordinate is not the same as submerged, please note-- was a predominant issue with the Victorians. By dint of severe rules as to what could and what could not be said, very little was said specifically, but much could be implied.

Take for example one obvious item of difference between the customs of the 1880's and the 1940's. In our grandmother's day women's dress was designed to emphasize femininity, the



body's action. It is possible to regress and it is also possible to over-estimate.

Verbal communication has been a single field of activity for many years. That of language and communication. Verbal communication has been the focus of the social order. That part of the world's activity has been in such a single channel which other channels could not be compared to the verbal channel that has a neglected status.

Given the situation, the extension of a formal order of relations and verbalization might have been planned as a formal order of activity within some sort of a formal order rather than as a luxury for the verbal order. Verbal communication and professional "responsibility".

Verbal communication is a form of the living relationship. Verbal communication is the reverse of the living relationship. Verbal communication is a form of the living relationship. Verbal communication is a form of the living relationship. Verbal communication is a form of the living relationship.

All of which would seem to point to the interesting possibility that the verbal relationship is not a verbal relationship. The verbal relationship is not a verbal relationship. The verbal relationship is not a verbal relationship. The verbal relationship is not a verbal relationship. The verbal relationship is not a verbal relationship.

Verbal communication is a form of the living relationship. Verbal communication is a form of the living relationship. Verbal communication is a form of the living relationship. Verbal communication is a form of the living relationship. Verbal communication is a form of the living relationship.



wasp waist, the accentuated hips and high bosom, the "fashionable bend", the spectacular, alluring ensemble of "the lovely flutter of her clothes". So in those days when legs were never mentioned, and even in womanly tête à tête were alluded to as "limbs", the accidental glimpse of an ankle must be reckoned as potent, oh very! It should not be necessary to labor the point that the furbelows and concealments of this earlier day may well have been more disturbing in their effects on the male of the species than the abbreviated halter and shorts of the streamlined feminine model of the 1940's. Our simplicity and candor, our casual acceptance of the near-nude, though frightening enough in their progressive stages, are conceivably less volcanic in their final effect. We pride ourselves upon knowing all there is to know, but the cold light of science lends ultimately something less than romantic exaltation-- a lift which was largely enjoyed by these same stuffy Victorians. To reveal is not necessarily to intrigue. In fact rather the reverse. They at least had an elaborate technique of concealment, which was not without its deliberate emphasis.

In outward appearance, then, our grandmothers stressed a showy elegance, and in manner a studied decorum. I use the word studied, not staid, for staid would denote stolid, and I find very little indication of anything stolid in the text of our American women novelists. Their extraordinary élan is no doubt part of their American heritage assuming a Victorian expression. -- So now, you see, we are confronted with their special dilemma of finding a vehicle for emotion without being



were given, the uncounted high and high bones, the "Cathedral"  
 style hand, the spontaneous, slightly suggestive of "the lovely  
 flatter of our elbows". As the bones were then were given  
 repeated, and even in womanly life a little more of the same  
 "flatter", the emotional effect of an artist must be repeated  
 as passed, or vary. It should not be necessary to know the  
 points that the emotional and emotional of this artist are  
 we will have been more absorbing in their effect on the mind  
 of the artist than the observed effect and effect of the  
 emotional feeling of the artist. Our emotional and  
 emotion, or emotional suggestion of the emotional, though it is  
 only a small part of the whole, and especially, it is  
 related to the whole effect. The artist's own is a good thing  
 in all these is to know, but the cold light of artistic feeling  
 which is sometimes less than the artistic emotion--a little  
 which we have enjoyed by those who have been very emotional.  
 reveal it not necessarily to the artist. In fact, the artist  
 were. They at least had an elaborate system of consciousness,  
 which was not without the artistic emotion.  
 In general appearance, then, our emotional system is  
 more complex, and in some a simple system. I was the  
 word emotional, and also, the artist's own emotion, and I  
 find very little indication of anything special in the form of  
 our emotional system. There is a tendency to be  
 no doubt part of this emotional system, and a tendency  
 expressed. -- So now, you see, we are confronted with this  
 special system of finding a vehicle for emotion without being



too specific about the emotion. The answer to the riddle at one moment in time, for instance in the ascetic Middle Ages, could take the form of a poetical symbolism. But the Victorians were not ascetic, they were riding the last wave of Puritanism, which is a very different matter. The Victorians were thoroughly sensuous, they worshiped fleshly beauty and grace of motion. Therefore they could put on and relish a pretentious display in clothes, in furniture, architecture, actions. Once inside their problem it is easy to see why they resorted to extremes of surface gesture to imply the turmoil of the seething undercurrent. Being what they were, under the pressure of convention, they contrived a superlative melodrama.

In 1888 occurred the first big intellectual explosion from women fiction writers in the United States with the appearance of three novels credited with founding "the feminine novel" \* in this country. Their number is an indication of the upward curve of feminine authorship, and their tone is charged with fresh assurance, not to say abandon. Women were beginning to be articulate in the form best designed to carry a reflection of life, and the fact that these three women were self-conscious pioneers in a restive age adds obviously to their daring. Singly and together they present a vibrant picture of the ferment

\* "The Feminine Novel" in "The New American Literature" by Fred Lewis Pattee, New York, 1937. Mr. Pattee includes also Laura Jean Libbey's "Miss Middleton's Lover" as of 1888. I believe this is an error, since the book is listed on a Libbey title-page of 1886; neither could it belong by any remotest chance in the same category with books by Atherton, Rives and Daintrey.



The specific about the question. The answer to the question is  
 one word in three. For instance in the second volume of the  
 could take the form of a general synthesis. But the synthesis  
 here and there, they were riding the last wave of liberalism,  
 which is a very different matter. The Victorian was a  
 highly sensitive, they worshipped fleshly beauty and they  
 religion. Therefore they could not on and relied a practical  
 display in clothes, in furniture, architecture, religion. These  
 inside their bodies it is easy to see why they reacted so  
 against of modern culture to look the whole of the world  
 unknown. Being what they were, when the pressure of  
 revolution, they received a spiritual message.  
 In 1880 occurred the first big intellectual revolution in  
 when fiction writers in the United States with the appearance  
 of three novels entitled with headings "The Feminist novel",  
 in this country. Their number is an indication of the growth  
 given an intimate relationship, and their form is changed with  
 their appearance, not to say religion. Women were beginning to  
 be effective in the form that changed to carry a religious  
 of life, and the fact that these three were well-known  
 elsewhere in a positive way also obviously to their being. This  
 by and together they present a different picture of the female

2  
 "The Feminist Novel" in "The New American Literature" by Fred  
 Lewis Pattee, New York, 1907. Mr. Pattee indicates also James  
 Jean Library's "Woman's Power" as of 1880. I believe  
 this is an error, since the book is listed on a library list-  
 page of 1885. Further could be found by any research done  
 in the same category with books by Ashmun, Rivers and others.



of this special moment. Gertrude Atherton published her first volume, "What Dreams May Come"<sup>1</sup>; likewise Amelie Rives appeared with "The Quick or the Dead?"<sup>2</sup>, long remembered for the extraordinary sensation it created. And Laura Daintrey, unhappily hard to trace -- though in 1902 her books were still circulating in paper-bound volumes, brought out a volcanic brief novel, "Eros"<sup>3</sup>. These three books are deservedly museum pieces today. The emotional excitement of their tone is terrific. I shall quote and quote largely, for only in their own words can the peculiar sensuous gusto of these founders of the feminine novel in the United States be conveyed.

Note the tumultuous baroque motion in the opening lines of Amelie Rives' "The Quick or the Dead?" :

There was a soughing rain asweep that night, with no wind to drive it. Yet it ceased and fell, sighed and was hushed incessantly, as by some changing gale. Barbara was a good deal unnerved by the lanternless drive from the station. The shelving road, seamed with abrupt gullies, lay through mark fields and stony hollows, that she well remembered; in the glimpsing lightning she saw scurrying trees against the suave autumn sky, like etchings on bluish paper; the dry, white-brown grasses swirled about the horses' feet in that windless rain; and after what thunderous fashion those horses pounded stableward! They hurled through narrow gateways like stones from a catapult, rushed past ragged trees whose boles seemed leaping to meet them, spun over large stones as though they had been mere fallen leaves . . .

1) "What Dreams May Come" by Frank Lin (pseudonym) Belford, Clarke and Company, Chicago, New York and San Francisco. 1888.

2) "The Quick or the Dead?" by Amelie Rives. Lippincott's Monthly Magazine, April 1888. Philadelphia, Pa.

3) "Eros" by Laura Daintrey. Belford, Clarke and Company, Chicago, New York and San Francisco. 1888.







Barbara Pomfret is a young widow-- ravishingly handsome, needless to say-- just now returning to her home, overwhelmed with bereavement and ominously aware that the place will call up memories of the times her husband stayed with her there. The crisis comes soon, touched off by the sight of a cigar-stub left from two years back by her husband's vacant chair. (What housekeepers they must have been in those days!)

She put both hands to her breast with a movement of anguish. Tears clustered hot and stinging on her lashes, and great breaths that were deeper than sobs thrilled through her from head to foot. Ah, she had been a fool to come here . . .  
(P. 435)

It would seem a difficult feat to keep up this pace set so early in the story, but Amelie Rives-- acclaimed in 1892 by one Mr. Alden, editor of Harper's Magazine, as "the greatest genius since Shakespeare"\* -- can do it. Lush and violent, violent and lush is the required cycle. Follows at once a candid Victorian repudiation of the ascetic principle:

As she flung herself exhausted into an armchair near the fire, the wide sleeve of her dressing gown fell back, revealing the smooth flesh of her arm, stained violet here and there by the rich veins.

She bent, uttering a sharp, inarticulate cry, and caressed it with slow movements of her cheek. She remembered how he had loved to kiss her delicate, inner arm when dressed in this very gown, and even as she smiled for the dear memory, there came upon her, with a surge of rebellion and revolt, the knowledge that he was now above such fleshly pleasures; that he would not now care for any of the sweet, warm, trivial things for which he had once cared so passionately. She leaped up, lifting her hands high above her head and pressing them agonizedly together, she tried to realize that he was a spirit, a purified

\*"Adventures of a Novelist" by Gertrude Atherton. Liveright Inc., New York 1932. p. 219.







essence , a soul, merely; and as the idea took shape within her, she shrank from and loathed it, then fell into bitter human weeping . . . (p. 44<sup>7</sup>)

It is only fair to remark in passing that even if the above connotes a strenuous distaste for incorporeal existence, there is nonetheless a certain conviction about the spiritual state. Where such conviction exists the mind is preoccupied with something beyond a dead level of materialism. It is a curious fact that the Victorians seem to have preserved their belief in the after-life with a grim loss of vision which could persuade them of delight therein. They were believers, but satisfaction appears to have been confined to the things of sense. This is a quite average position, though not often candidly stated. Barbara is being very forthright about it; Amelie Rives is speaking with a new challenge, and if we fail to catch the startling, even rather shocking rebellion in this passage we miss the substance of it.

Barbara's husband is dead, that is certain, though his spiritual presence continues as a protagonist of the story. Enter now the antagonist in the person of the deceased's cousin, whose likeness to him could be described as nothing short of identical. In Barbara's musings on this amazing fact occurs a splendid example of the Victorian delight in posturing and pageantry of motion:

His pictured face was not so much like him as was the face of his cousin, John Dering! She was in her bedroom, and alone, so did not forbear to cry out, and moan, and talk to herself in panting fragments, as she swept about the room, taking first a







vibrating stride or two, then leaning against some piece of furniture and pressing away the hair from her face with both hands; then crouching and trembling with hidden eyes, or rushing from wall to wall with all the restrained, breathless eagerness of some prisoned, pantherish creature whose efforts for freedom had long been vain. (p. 447)

This is emoting to the nth degree; crying out, moaning, talking to herself in "panting fragments", sweeping about the room, and this designated in its component parts, first as "a vibrating stride or two", next in leaning picturesquely on the furniture while she presses her disheveled hair-- could it have been anything else?-- from her face with both hands; crouching and trembling with "hidden eyes", then rushing-- oh my! -- from wall to wall like . . . Well, what could it be like? It must be the most violent picture of desperation in the effort to escape. "A prisoned, pantherish creature", that's what Barbara's motions were like. Not a bad piece of description at all, if you like this sort of thing, and our grandmothers just ate it up. Perhaps we have done them less than justice in supposing they were timid, tame little creatures.

In brief, Barbara loves this cousinly reincarnation of her husband madly. She is a striking figure of a woman in her own right, and the man is as responsive as the situation demands. Now they have a series of dramatic encounters while nature lends an appropriately grandiose background of storm and stress:

The fields were a seething mass of dark-gray weeds and grasses; the sky a flapping cloak of gray blown back from the shoulders of some invisible giantess, and the shadows on the bleached downs her footprints. (p. 449)

He took her bare hand in his; their full pulses throbbed







into one. She gazed at him with sparkling eyes; her lips curled cornerwise into a smile, and she drew ragged, uneven breaths. She fancied that it would be like this if she had gone to visit her husband's grave in this ghoul-light, and he had come up in his grave-clothes and sat on its edge and talked to her. But Dering's hand was not the hand of the dead. She drew hers away suddenly, and started to her feet, when a slanting blast dashed her down again beside him. Putting out his hand to draw her furs about her, he let it rest against her throat. She shivered, and shrunk down a little from his touch. (p. 451)

Well, my feminine readers of 1944, this may be funny, but certainly not for what it leaves unsaid. It is naive, not prudish. With a bit more subtlety of presentation we today ought to be able to sense the magnetism between the two without being stirred to mockery. There were prudes among the Victorians, of course, probably too many of them. And that is just why Amelie Rives caused such a furore, some of protest, some of relief, as she struck out with her ecstatic abandon to emotionalism. Here at least in 1888 in the United States of America we have a fresh challenging feminine voice proclaiming a fierce delight in living. Oh, she is grandiloquent in her beginnings, but that is of the period. Ornamentation is the very breath of their nostrils, a quality which in itself suggests exuberant vitality.

All too briefly now we must dismiss Barbara, unhappily swayed in the end from her earthly love after a ghostly interview between herself and her dead husband as (just another) storm overtakes her in a lonely church. She must be true to her first and only love: such is the exalted and tearful dedication concluding this romantic encounter.

Laura Daintrey in "Eros" writes with rather less lyrical elan than Amelie Rives-- she is not so young nor so poetical--







but if possible with even more melodramatic ardor. She appears to have been versatile, and might have made a realist of a later school, one suspects, as she quietly introduces the characters gathered around a boarding house table. The faintest clue to what she might have been soon disappears, however, as the deep-dyed villain, Dominus and his mate and match in all ways, Mamie, take over the center of the stage. What a dashing entrance this same Dominus makes!

The splendid proportions of his figure, equally powerful and imposing, were enhanced by his well-cut morning dress. Iron-gray hair and moustache gave his face a peculiar distinction. His hands were sinewy and brown; the left was gloved, the right uncovered; the shades of his gloves and neckscarf, of his gaiters and his heavy cane, concerted a delicate accord of tints which harmonized his toilet . . . His expression was of hauteur and determination, frequently of disdain . . . He was habitually adored by women, and habitually disliked by men . . . He was a man of the senses, not of the brain; his intelligence only carried him far enough to estimate the effect of his splendid figure, of the calculated undulations of his voice, and to perceive in each case with cynical intuition, the proportion of falter necessary to intoxicate . . . He reigned through the eternal fascination of Evil. (pp. 8-9)

Such was the manner of presenting a character, the line, the color, gesture, expression, amounting to a portrait study in words. To our way of seeing things it slows down the action, but to the readers of 1888 it was no doubt interesting for the very fact that it amounted to the character's posing for analysis on the very threshold of the story. And after this momentary and meaty "still" there are ways of compensating for any apparent delay. Dominus has entered the suite of his mistress, Mamie. See now, how passionate their mutual attraction, once



and it possible with even more elaborate order. The system  
to have been very little, and might have made a model of a job  
or more, one or more, as the quality of the work was  
the system was a working paper. The system was  
so that the night was not a day, however, as the  
deep-dyed white, brown and his wife and son in all ways,  
Maurice, took over the house of the night. What a day it  
was, this was a day in the

The system of the system of the system, especially powerful and  
important, were changed by his well-known system. From  
every side and every side, gave him a better idea of  
the hands were always and always, the last was given, the  
right movement, the sides of his hands and movement, at  
his hands and his hands, gave him a better idea of  
this which was the last. The system was  
of hands and movement, especially of hands, the  
was definitely changed by the, and especially of hands, the  
He was a man of the system, not of the system, his  
intelligence only showed his last, as a system of hands  
of his system, of the system of hands, the  
was, and to give him a better idea of hands, the  
the system of hands, the system of hands, the  
reached through the system of hands, the system of hands, the

that was the system of hands, the system of hands, the  
color, green, orange, yellow, the system of hands, the  
words. To the system of hands, the system of hands, the  
but to the system of hands, the system of hands, the  
very fact that it was the system of hands, the system of hands, the  
in the system of hands, the system of hands, the  
the system of hands, the system of hands, the  
the system of hands, the system of hands, the  
the system of hands, the system of hands, the



the perfunctory chaperone tactfully withdraws:

For a second they regarded each other with intensity; then, with a mutual electric impulse, rose. She gave a smothered cry through clenched teeth, and his kisses burned upon her eyelids. She lay, passionately passive in his arms, silently holding up her face towards his lips as a sun-flower holds its fierce, gold disk towards the light, insatiably persistent.

"My King!" she whispered; she called him this. He answered, "My little Queen!"

The coalition of these two natures created a formidable moral combination. Between them there was no reserve, and they worshipped together the naked deity of a rapturous and abandoned passion. It was the union of the tigress with the tiger, of the siren with the daemon. Their intrigue, fugitive, fetterless and masked, had indescribable attractions. (p. 13)

These "indescribable attractions" of the illicit relation, this "eternal fascination of Evil", strike us today as curious phrases. They have, unless I am mistaken, a remote, foreign, almost untranslatable sound to us, for evil if it is known or admits itself today moves under a guileless mask. It argues itself into all sorts of innocent interpretations. But not so in "Eros" of 1888 where it flaunts itself over against the tepid sweetness of poor little Marie, the wistful, utterly virtuous and neglected admirer of the equally virtuous though more complicated hero of the tale, Shapira. These two are required ballast, and may serve as examples of what the Victorians expected in the way of virtue, wherefore we can hardly wonder at the temptation to follow a more picturesque and variable course. Shapira in the end marries Marie, and domestic sweetness and light swathe them as they enter together upon happiness ever after. But in the long interim our rising young financier is snared by that arch-siren, Mamie, whose aim is solely Shapira's money while her stormy heart rests fast in the fascinating,







fiend-like grasp of "her King", Dominus. Such virtue as we find exemplified in this book is too-too dull to deserve more than passing mention, as one suspects it received passing if due attention from the readers of its day. The vitality, the histrionics, all the color and verve of the story are centered in the villainess and her villain. The theme of the fascination of evil recurs again and again;

Pure and inexperienced women have regarding certain men infallible perceptions; either they feel for them inexplicable dread or subtle fascination. In the first case they experience the evil; in the second, its basilisk attraction. (p. 46)

And as if Dominus were not sufficient to carry the full weight of this fascination, a minor variation on the theme must be introduced in the person of one Jarvis who is residing at the same boarding house with Marie, and may be supposed to be up to no good; especially must his propinquity to the helpless little heroine be interpreted as perilous. Jarvis enters:

a sinister and distinguished presence, ironic, impenetrable; a man of fine appearance, with luminous stone blue eyes, whose beauty had been damaged by a singularly dissipated progress towards middle-age. Regarding him there was some feminine curiosity. . . this was fed by the arrival of perfumed correspondence carried by a liveried footman. Jarvis was aware of his enigmatic aspect in the eyes of the boarding house, and assumed an added air of cynical and cosmopolitan culture in conversation. . . He was in fact a wary veteran gambler, whose Parisian record was extended and promiscuous, and for whom a beautiful woman of ton had conceived an irrational passion. (p. 40)

Sinister but distinguished, you observe, with a Parisian record extended and promiscuous. It was about this time that French novels began to make their inroads upon the American







woman's mental horizon. Mrs. Stowe, moralist that she is, attacks the French fashion ferociously. But the newly enlarged frontiers of the imagination will not yield even to Mrs. Stowe's capable pen, since they conform to a felt need. Here in the United States we were still a provincial people culturally in the 1880's, and for some time after. To be sure, James Fenimore Cooper, Walt Whitman and Mark Twain had blazed new trails and were speaking in a distinctly American idiom. But their very virility set them apart from anything American women could assimilate for use. Meanwhile the limitations of domestic life could pall, as one of our quiet but observing essayists, Katherine Conway noted as late as 1904\*, recognizing the need for some outlet from conditions that were "over-crowded, colorless, flavorless". And so we begin to develop at least a would-be cosmopolitanism, an interest in the experienced personality, even if the experience is not of the recommended kind. Most obviously we turn to Europe for examples, acutely aware that in this new country there is still only a pseudo-sophistication.

Specifically Laura Daintrey has something to say about the limitations of the woman's horizon in this period. As the vehicle for this protest she chooses necessarily not Marie, who would suggest only delighted acquiescence, but that arch-villainess, Mamie; for Mamie, you observe, has certain constructive qualities, such as mentality, initiative, courage. And when Mamie speaks on this subject, her tone is one of direct simplic-

\* "The Christian Gentlewoman and the Social Apostolate", by Katherine E. Conway. Thomas J. Flynn & Company. Boston 1904.







ity; she drops her siren's wiles and must be understood as the voice of women of talent in her generation:

You cannot think how fettered women are: we fret, we crave, we long for something perhaps within our immediate reach, and what a man would work for and secure, a woman waits for to miss. A man has a hundred ways to eminence; women only perhaps the arts, in which there are so few successes. There is one Rachel, one Georges Sand, one Rosa Bonheur; and of all the rest who have tried, what is the record? Mediocre success, which is worse than failure; talent, and that is Genius reflected in the mirror of Mediocrity . . . Sometimes I grow unrestful and perplexed and helpless, and think that nothing is worth while-- existence is tasteless and I crave for something fuller colored, more splendid, more accordant . . . (p. 136)

Such ring of conviction from a character apparently as one-sided as Mamie, a sheer selfish, unprincipled manipulator of sex for her own luxurious satisfaction, may at first strike the reader as an inconsistency in delineation. But a little way back, remember, we confronted the fact that sex was the only career open to a woman, and Mamie, it must be admitted, is a woman gifted in many ways. Under scrutiny these words from this woman might yield the moral which Laura Daintrey artistically, perhaps ironically, withholds. Just what would one expect Mamie to do with herself under the circumstances? We know nothing of how her alliance with Dominus began, but no doubt he presented a career of a kind; and then failed to materialize, although she had had the misfortune to allow her emotions to become involved. And then what? Mamie, who is elsewhere so theatrical that one could hardly sympathize, strikes here a deeper note, speaking with that disturbing conviction which in time revolutionizes the social order.







Now to return to the story. Mamie has begun to recognize the worldly value of an alliance with Shapira, yet, realizing life with him would be exceedingly dull in comparison, she frankly approaches "her King" on the subject of marriage. As frankly he tells her that his meagre ten thousand dollars a year would never serve to support them both, suavely stating that he would much prefer to give her a handsome present occasionally and go on as they are. Promptly the realistic Mamie proceeds to magnetize that poor babe-in-the-wood, Shapira with his pretty millions.

The technique of coquetry is a lost art with us today; with the incoming of the direct approach all that elaborate method of personal attraction and communication between the sexes, especially through the eyes, has vanished into the forgotten past. Watch now, girls, how an experienced woman went about getting her man in 1888, and forever after hold your peace about the 1880's being naive;

"What kind of music do you care for?" she asked him. "You spoke of music with romance, with passion . . ." She was looking up into his eyes. Shapira, who did not know the witchcraft of women, which they practise coolly with a steady brain as they once mixed love-philtres with a steady hand, felt a subtle thrill stir through his blood . . .

Without setting the written score before her, and still sinking into his her regard, insatiable, inscrutable, magnetic, she played; a music like the night-wind in the trees, or the sigh of lips becoming weary of caresses . . .

The eyes of the invincible coquette took fire; she looked at him and smiled. The atmosphere of the music was again about him, but intensified, rendered irresistible; the flame-touch of a thousand possibilities had swept his future; the perfume of her dominant influence filled his present; he felt that a presence arbitrary and caressing, powerful and subtle, delicious and inexplicable, had closed round his life an intangible fetter, whose lock would be a glance, a touch . . . a kiss.







He met her eyes and her smile: his own responded with the blaze of a new indomitable light.  
Venus Pandemus had conquered. (p. 63)

The eyes of the coquette exerted a "magnetic tyranny"-- "pregnant with so many secrets"; they were of such power as to cause all the poor man's blood to "reel back towards his heart", while his face became so pale that his own defenceless organs of vision "seemed to shine from the face of a dead man."

Who, I wonder now, is naive? We or the Victorians? But they had the conscious weapon of a finished, complex technique; they had an elaborate art, which we have discarded for our vaunted simplicity and candor. Falling so in love with facts, we have lost metaphor. Gloomily, enviously, I begin to wonder if in many vital instances we are not rather more childlike than the generation of our grandmothers.

Mamie's magnetic glance has thrown us off the trail of Dominus-- for which no apologies. But now that Shapira is snared we should not miss the effect on the discarded lover. Dominus is seeing Mamie home from the party where she so obviously set her cap for the young millionaire, and the masterful villain is not pleased.

"What are you going to do with him?" he ground through his strong shut teeth. She regarded him with an insouciant smile.

"I am going to become his wife."

"By the living God," swore Dominus, with a sound like a strangled roar, "you shall not!"

He gripped her wrists and stood leaning over her, suggesting a wild beast above its prey. (p. 65-6)

That Dominus was beastly no one would deny. The curious feat-







ure about him and the metaphor used to describe him is that the association of men with beasts is used as often as not in the 1880's to render the human part of the equation more and not less attractive. Clearly there was a savage something abroad in the air in those days; whether savage because human nature is never thoroughly tamed, however "decorous" the period, or a sort of play savage in the sense that Marie Antoinette took to the simple shepherdess's life and the eighteenth century fell in love with the "noble savage", seems nearly as bewildering a problem as whether the hen or the egg came first. But since we are dealing with the United States of America where our imported Victorian culture was none too sure of itself, was only imperfectly indigenous, we should allow for a genuine barbarian element in this zest for the animal metaphor, which conversely was enhanced by the rigorous code of decorum ruling each admitted detail of life.

Strikingly recurrent throughout "Eros", the literary convention of likening men to beasts in order to make them interesting appears to meet the imaginative need of the moment to visualize the characters in dramatic pose and motion. If Dominus is superlatively beastly, he at least does not lend himself to such variations on the theme as does Mamie. Note always the picturesqueness of the tableaux she presents:

At dawn she slept; her splendid inert shape lay like the body of a tired beast of prey, the rich contours voluptuous in repose, the intensity of the vital force disguised and dormant.  
 Her leonine personality was shaded with intellectual attributes and intuitions; this informed its animal force with a perilous subtlety. (p. 208)







She had a fine feline fibre in her which recognized the compensations of luxurious ease; like a slumbrous tigress she transiently sheathed her claws, merging passion in a mood superbly indolent. (p. 203)

She moaned, a little tremulous sound like the wail of an animal in pain. (p. 163)

Her mouth's curve drooped in a swift line of anger, gloomy, cynical, and full of pride. She sat with her hands clasped together on her knee, bending forward like a couchant lioness. (p. 135)

And so our reputedly moralistic grandmothers flirted frankly with this most unmoral and destructive of images: the human enhanced by likeness to the brute. Extraordinary reversal of our preconceptions! Granted, these two novels of 1888, "The Quick or the Dead?" and "Eros", speaking with an unmistakable tone of rebellion, do not represent the whole of their generation. Most specifically they do not represent the 1870's for which Mrs. Stowe has spoken. To the moralizing tone of the earlier day they break in with impassioned rebuttal, striking out with new verve, breaking down the barriers of suppressed emotion, and proving in the extent of their abandon just how deeply felt the need of expressiveness had become.

The fade-out of that unscrupulous villainess, Mamie, presents the ultimate in defiance. Divorced by her long-suffering husband, Shapira, she returns to Dominus, only to break with him in a superlatively theatrical interview in Paris; yet she suffers no decline of fortune, no vengeance of conscience. Rather does she proceed from triumph to triumph, and we last glimpse her on the glittering heights:

It was impossible that a woman of Mamie's powerful ambition and dominant personality should drop out of sight . . . A







sinner of passive and ductile traits, one to be led instead of leading, would probably, burdened with a broken heart, have drifted helplessly to sordid shame. . . . A new star rose on the horizon of the Parisian demimonde. She combined the attributes of the genuine adventuress; a woman without scruples, without modesties, without regrets; possessing, besides experience, resources; attracting by the magnetism of her personality added to that of beauty. Her thousandfold caprice prompted her to a perpetual demand for interest and variety; she became celebrated for her fastidiousness and her magnificence, and was one of the half-dozen women of pleasure by whom it was a distinction to be loved . . . . She was impervious to the recognized disadvantages of her position. She had none of those soft domestic instincts which produce the joys and sorrows of her sex; she was formed to be a happy tyrant where others become happy slaves. She remembered Dominus with regret, with ridicule, with indifference, with anger or with passion, following the variations of her mood, and with long intermissions of oblivion. The reason of her not forgetting him lay in the fact of a woman's inevitable lenient memory of her first great passion. With this human trait blended many feline attributes; combining a remorseless, insatiable, passionate, mutable and elastic organism, which personally gratified knew no impersonal sorrows, and cultivating an egotism synonymous with content, subsisted on self-centered pleasures. (pp. 253-4)

Laura Daintrey is too far forgotten and <sup>unfortunately</sup> ~~xxx~~ difficult to trace today. She would be worth knowing at some length!

If Mrs. Stowe directed her more sober and realistic shafts at the legend of the dependent, clinging vine type of woman, so again here we have an extraordinary extension of the theme,-- with the moral left out. It is not yet 1890, the women who are writing in America are still few, but the investigation of the feminine nature by those most capable of pursuing this complex task is getting off to a very good start.

Gertrude Atherton makes her debut with a novel quite as unique and sensational as should be expected of that always arresting person who has wielded a powerful pen over fully fifty years in the formative period of the "feminine novel" in the







United States. Mrs. Atherton was not as young as Amelie Rives in 1888; she was already thirty-one, Miss Rives was twenty-five; yet the extreme youth evident in "What Dreams May Come" is in part explained by the fact that Mrs. Atherton had spent four years in trying to find a publisher. No wonder! since the plot of the book is utterly wild, wilder than anything Rives or Daintrey contrived, for they at least kept one foot on the ground. Whereas Gertrude Atherton, choosing the imaginative freedom of a setting in Constantinople and Wales, suffers no slightest mundane drag on her conceptions designed for the delectation of the excitable American public of that day. "Worthless" the author termed this volume in her maturity. Yet not quite worthless, since a publisher was found, and so it may serve as an index to what the reading public could absorb in the way of romantic extravagance, and as a social commentary likewise reflects the spirit of the times.

Notice at the outset the richness of color and line, the sensuous, aesthetic note:

The sun sank lower, Constantinople's richer tints faded into soft opal hues, and the muezzin called the people to prayer. From a window in a wing of the Embassy furthest from the banqueting hall, and overlooking the city, a woman watched the shifting panorama below. She was more beautiful than any of her neglected guests, although her eyes were heavy and her face was pale. Her hair was a rich, burnished brown, and drawn up to the crown of her head in a loose mass of short curls, held in place by a half-coronet of diamonds. In front the hair was parted and curled, and the entire head was encircled by a band of diamond stars which pressed the bronze ringlets low over the forehead; the head was oval and admirably poised. (p. 11)

Dull, ponderous,-- inexcusably bad technique to start off a story so, you say? Oh no, not in 1888. They loved color, they







loved pictures in words, they loved the grand style of portraiture. Gertrude Atherton here is speaking simply for her day, her originality has not yet entered, but she is speaking very well. And I suggest that any reader who is bored, should read and re-read the above passage until he feels that picture with its lush tints enter his imagination. Once visualized I defy him to say it is not pleasurable. We appear to have arrived at a point where our imagination is atrophied unless constantly hammered into play by action. Not so our grandmothers; they were quite capable of contemplation.

Now enter Gertrude Atherton with her special message which will carry her a long, long way: the emphasis on individuality, originality, mind, rebellion:

It was the individuality of the woman that made her beauty, not features or coloring. The keen, intelligent eyes, with their unmistakable power to soften, the spiritual brow, the strong, sensuous chin, the tender mouth, the spirited head, each a poet's delight, each an artist's study, all blended, a strange, strong, passionate story in flesh and blood-- a remarkable face. Her neck and arms were bare, and she wore a short-waisted gown of yellow satin, which fell in shining lines from belt to hem. (p. 12)

You will have to stand a little more of this, although I feel it is wise to appease your impatience by letting you know this picturesque lady is waiting for her lover, who is not far distant. Now for a hint of passion, and again more mise en scène till at last the hurled defiance:

She turned suddenly and picked up some loose sheets of manuscript . . . A proud smile curved her mouth, then faded swiftly as she pressed the pages passionately to her lips . . . The room was Oriental . . . The walls were



lowest passages in words, they loved the grand style of poetry.  
Mrs. Johnson's attention here is speaking strongly for her day, her  
unmistakable has not yet entered, but she is speaking very well.  
And I thought that my readers who are bored, should read and re-  
read the above passages until he feels that history with the  
last time before his imagination. Once visualized I feel his  
to say it is not pleasant. It appears to have arrived at a  
point where our imagination is recognized unless consciously  
connected into that by action. Not so our imagination; this  
was under capable of comprehension.

For other persons history with her special message which  
will never be a book, long with the emphasis on individual-  
ity, originality, and rebellion.

It was the individuality of the woman that made her beauty  
and features of coloring. The town, intelligent even, with  
their remarkable power to suffer, the quiet and brave, the  
strong, abundant calm. The tender heart, the spiritual heart,  
each a good's delight, each an exquisite thing, all blended, a  
unique, strong, passionate story in flesh and blood--a woman  
also free. The good and true, some here, and she was a woman  
related even of yellow skin, which tell in shining lines from  
p. 12)

You will have to stand a little more of this, although I  
feel it is also to suggest your imagination by feeling you know  
this phenomenon here is waiting for her lover, who is not far  
distant. Now for a hint of passion, and again more than an  
again still at last, the buried desire:

The burned suddenly and picked up some loose sheets of con-  
struction. A good wife moved her hands, then led  
with as she opened the door, and mentally as she left.  
The wife was beautiful.



hung with heavy, soft, Eastern stuffs, dusky and rich, which shut out all suggestion of doors.

Anything as bleakly utilitarian as a door, you know, these Victorians found suggestive of poverty in appointments; hence, since doors were still necessary, they covered them up, as they covered up many other things, with decorative hangings of one kind or another. Always, always, they sought the beautiful-- at least what they believed beautiful-- in luxurious effect. There is still more:

The black marble floor was covered with a strange assortment of wild beasts' skins, pale, tawny, sombre, ferocious. There were deep soft couches and great piles of cushions, a few rare paintings stood on easels, and the air was heavy with jasmine. The woman's lids fell over her eyes, and the blood mounted slowly, making her temples throb. Then she threw back her head, a triumphant light flashing in her eyes, and brought her open palm down sharply on the table. "If I fall," she said, "I fall through strength, not through weakness. If I sin, I do so willingly, not in a moment of overmastering passion." (p. 13)

Yes, this is very, very young. And yet the features of Gertrude Atherton are vaguely discernible. In a period which elevates passion to the peak of human experience, here is this young woman insisting upon the justification of conscious, deliberate choice. This is worth remembering as we follow Gertrude Atherton through to her final repudiation of passion in "Black Oxen", discussed in a later chapter.

But let us not rush the story-- we are still in 1888, and passion is having its day, passion relished to the fullest in pantomime. Here now is the lady's encounter, at the "crisis of her destiny" with her lover approaching through those mysterious



hang with heavy, soft, downy folds, heavy and thick, which  
and all suggest of beauty.

Anything as delicate as a flower, you know, these  
Victorians found suggestive of poverty in appearance; hence  
since these were still necessary, they covered them up, as they  
covered up many other things, with decorative hangings of one  
kind or another. Always, always, they sought the beautiful--  
at least what they collected beautiful--in luxurious effect.

There is still more!

The black marble table was covered with a heavy arrangement  
of wild flowers, ferns, palms, ferns, flowers, flowers, flowers  
were deep soft cushions and great piles of cushions, a few were  
cushions stood on seats, and the air was heavy with flowers.  
The woman's face fell over her eyes, and the black marble table  
ly, making her fingers tremble. Then she knew that her heart  
attracted light looking in her eyes, and brought her over again  
down sharply on the table. "If I tell," she said, "I tell  
through strength, and through weakness. If I say, I do so with  
clarity, not in a moment of overwhelming passion." (p. 10)

Yes, this is very, very young. And yet the flowers of her  
tride from one wearily dissatisfied. In a period which al-  
ever passed to the peak of human experience, here in this  
young woman's relation upon the perfection of experience, deli-  
timate choice. This is worth remembering as we follow her  
Alison through to her final rejection of passion in "Black  
Oreo," discussed in a later chapter.

But let us not run the story--we will in 1888, and  
passion is having its day, passion related to the fullest in  
passion. Here now in the lady's encounter, at the "table of  
her destiny" with her lover approaching through those mysterious



### Oriental corridors:

She bent suddenly forward, her breath coming quickly. There were footsteps at the end of the marble corridor without. For a moment she trembled from head to foot. Remorse, regret, horror, fear, chased each other across her face, her convulsed features reflecting the emotions which for weeks past had oppressed heart and brain. Then, before the footsteps reached the door, she was calm again and her head erect. The glory of the sunset had faded, and behind her was the short grey twilight of the Southern night; but in her face was the magic light that never was on sea or land. (p. 13)

From this moment forward, of course, the modern reader's tastes are doomed to frustration: once the man is in her presence nothing more specific is offered than that he led her "into the darkness of the room". I am not sure that this meagre fact is so unsatisfactory, where the imagination has some material to work on. It would appear that the moderns are the uninstructed at the rate we demand instruction, at the rate nothing is left to the imagination, as if that feeble faculty could never proceed under its own power.

Now hold your hats on while we proceed to a synopsis of what happens. It was Sir Dafyd-ap-Penrhyn's wife who was having the affair with one Dartmouth. Sir Dafyd, suspicious, rises from his state banquet and coolly dispatches them both "in the darkness of the room". But each of the culprits in time acquires a grandchild, Weir Penrhyn and Harold Dartmouth, who have an extraordinary sense of recognition when they meet for the first time in their youth. Even more strange is a heavy, indefinable sense of guilt burdening the conscience of the young and inexperienced Weir. Harold, seeking some clue to the mystery, dis-







covers that his beloved can remember no further back than her ninth year when she was thrown from her horse and instantly killed. -- Her father would not permit his child to be consigned to the cold, cold ground, has her packed in ice and preserved for his daily visitations. One day the child moves, recovers, is restored to full activity. Harold broods over the enigma of their strange sense of earlier relationship, and finally solves it as a case of reincarnation, he of his grandfather, while Weir's personality is preempted by the wandering, restless shade of Siomed, who cannot be happy in the other world without her beloved. And so they meet again, but again are doomed, because of their earlier sin.

It is here that Mrs. Atherton gives us a dissertation on the double standard of morality. The Victorians, as we vaguely envisage them, have left a reputation for strait-laced principles. Oh, but they were excessively romantic, and much could be condoned under the pressure of overmastering emotion. Men were supposed to suffer more from these emotions than women, and therefore more should be permitted them in the way of moral latitude. One cannot read very far without discovering that the men who were continually being worsted in this unequal battle with "the primal force" were far and away the more interesting and attractive of their sex. And these men love to admit their weaknesses, and apparently the women listen to these confessions without disedification. Harold is conversing with Miss Penrhyn after a social evening in supposedly the best circles:



...that his beloved was somewhere in further back than her  
...from her eyes and faintly  
...for father would not permit this child to be con-  
...to the cold, cold ground, but her body in the end  
...for his daily visitation. One day the child moved,  
...in response to full activity. Her body moved, and the  
...of their various means of earthly relationship, and the  
...it as a sense of relationship, as of his presence,  
...personality is presented by the weathering, and  
...of which, she cannot be happy in the other world  
...And so they wait again, but again the  
...of their earlier life.

It is a hard thing for Adam to give up a demonstration on the  
...of morality. The Victorian, as we usually con-  
...have left a reputation for virtue-faced hypocrisy.  
...and such souls to con-  
...of overwhelming emotion. Her own  
...from these emotions than work, and  
...in the way of work.  
...the world would very far ahead of everything that  
...being wanted in this world.

...the great force, was far and away the more inter-  
...of their own. And these men have to ad-  
...and especially the women living in these  
...Haskell is concerned with  
...a social evening in sympathy with the



"I am undoubtedly a very reprehensible character, Miss Penrhyn, but I don't think that I am worse than most men . . . We are a bad lot . . . Do you think the life of any one of these men who have surrounded you tonight, and upon whom you certainly did not frown, would bear inspection?" (pp.34-6)

Harold's excuse for extensive and promiscuous philandering is again the romantic one that life is so intolerably boring that he must seize what emotional relief he can find. His success with women, ironically enough, amounts even to a recurrence of monotony, for they had shown themselves willing "as a rule" to take him "on any terms". When we begin to examine this situation logically we must find ourselves confronted with the problem of how the "double standard" remained double under the circumstances. The burden of respectability must have been cast upon the shoulders of the very few, according to Mrs. Atherton's presentation of the problem, though doubtless we should allow for her youthful tendency toward sweeping generalizations.

Weir and the other ladies of her time, these being the ladies, understand, had their own system of values to apply to such situations. It was an accepted fact among them that a man of the world should love "a good many women and live in the widest sense", but there would still be only one of these women who could reach to the remote and exalted region of his heart. It is the role of these women to reform these men. Harold's case in falling in love with Weir testifies to the solutions of 1888:

. . . for conventional morality (he) felt the contempt it deserved. Nevertheless, in loving this girl, the finest and







highest instincts of his nature had been aroused. He had felt for her even more of sentiment than of passion. When a man loves a girl whose mental purity is as absolute as her physical, there is intermingled with his love, a leavening quality of reverence, and the result is a certain purification of his own nature. That Dartmouth had found himself capable of such a love had been a source of keenest gratification to him. He had been lifted to a spiritual level which he had never touched before, and there he had determined to remain. (p. 161)

Now comes the poignant crux of the problem, the exquisite moral crisis for which our grandmothers had great zest. Harold is lifted above himself so long as he is in love with the ostensible Weir. But when he satisfies himself, through her confidences, that she is not Weir but actually the guilty shade of her grandmother incarnated in Weir, then comes the tragic denouement. Weir, inexperienced, innocent, yet feels in her love for Dartmouth the heavy burden of an illicit passion, which Dartmouth recognizes:

Every instinct in Sioned's nature was unaltered. If these instincts were undeveloped in her present existence, it was because Weir's sheltered life, and because she had met him this time before it was too late. (p. 162)

Alas, but it is too late.

The consciousness that their affection was the perpetuation of a lustful love disheartened and revolted him. . . . 'I placed her on a pedestal and rejoiced that I was able to do so. Now she is the woman whose guilty love sent us both to our death. I could never forget it. There would always be a spot on the sun.' (p. 165 & p. 177)

Whereupon Harold concludes he could no more marry Weir than he could marry his mistress-- an unheard of thing. And in this conclusion Weir concurs wholly:







'I am a woman for whose sin Time has no mercy; you are a madman, and I am alone.' (p. 191)

She proceeds to flee out into the ever-convenient storm to her certain death while Harold remains behind to rave himself into an ecstasy, culminating in his final words: "At last! Sioned! Sioned!" Which finale permits us to believe that such inexorable expiation of sin as these two suffered was confined to the terrestrial sphere,-- in Heaven they may be happily reunited.

"Too wildly improbable", "too unbridled", the publisher Henry Holt had told the author when she sought publication with him. True enough. But the young concern, Belford, Clarke and Company of Chicago, New York and San Francisco had the courage to take it on, and were justified in the sensation the book created. Mrs. Atherton in her autobiography\* recalls the storm over this little volume, which today is a collector's item. Columns upon columns of very vile abuse were heaped upon it by the newspaper reviewers. We may conclude that it received abundant free advertising, and that the public was not slow in taking up with a mooted scandal.

Finally, "What Dreams May Come" is a neat little microcosm of certain attitudes of mind prevalent among our grandmothers, and it served to launch Gertrude Atherton. Under all the fantastic melodrama of an incredibly over-wrought piece of imag-

\* "Adventures of a Novelist" by Gertrude Atherton. Liveright Inc., New York 1932.







ination, there are still evidences of the individuality and daring which will mark her later work.



in fact, these are still evidence of the latter and  
 being which was not later work.



## CHAPTER 1V

The drabness of women's circumscribed lives, recognized from the 1870's forward, relieved as it was by the heroics of such volumes as we have just surveyed, had even more spectacular and unqualified relief from a woman who stands unique, fortunately, in the annals of our literature-- Laura Jean Libbey. Rives, Daintrey and Atherton would seem to have presented excitement enough, but to the great amorphous average, this excitement was still weighted with a certain depressing burden of intellectuality. These three women of the foregoing chapter, and notably Harriet Beecher Stowe earlier in her plea for uplifting women's minds and characters, had in a more or less obvious manner been laying the foundation for threshing out serious issues. We like our reading serious, not to say grim today, but the U.S. reading public has not always been as intent upon facing the sordid facts as it appears to be now. There were readers aplenty in the decades just before and just after the turn of the century who wanted excitement plus, with no minus entailed in having to stop and think about things.

These normal if unenlightened people found the answer to their dearest hopes in the pages of one hailed on the title-page of "A Fatal Wooing"<sup>\*</sup> as "The Greatest Living Novelist, \*A Fatal Wooing" by Miss Laura Jean Libbey, Street & Smith Corporation, New York 1883.







whose stories no author has ever been able to equal, and whose fame as the Favorite Writer of the People has never been surpassed." Ambitious enough at the outset, you observe, and yet with a touching little note of deprecation winding up this otherwise hyperbolic blurb. Any appeal for the approval of the intellectuals, the bluestockings, the aristocrats-- for there is much about aristocracy, an assured note of class consciousness in books of this period-- is clearly waived. Miss Libbey is writing for the people, whose preeminence as arbiter of all things did not take place all at once in this great American democracy, nor has it been here long. We carried over the broad lines of Old World class distinctions well into the Twentieth Century, and there are some outposts of American civilization where you will find an amazing hangover of some such superiority complex lurking still. At least, since Miss Libbey has been so frankly designated with approval of her publisher as speaking for the humble run-of-the-mill of mankind, we may without fear of offense affirm that she did not fail in her mission, indeed that she fairly reeks of that vanished quantity, the lower middle class.

If nothing in her books could be related in any way to actuality, everything conversely can be understood as desirable by way of contrast with actuality. Where wealth, beauty, romantic thrills, hair-raising adventures are most conspicuous by their absence, the imagination, it appears, must be compensated. We have our movie thrillers today, with their postcard perspective of the luxurious life. The speed, the danger, the handsome







hero overcoming insuperable obstacles to rescue the desperate heroine from death or worse, the money flowing with magnificent abandon, the impossible twists in the plot to supply more, and then again one more extra bit of suspense by way of largesse to the avid audience-- here they are in heaped-up measure provided by Laura Jean Libbey whose volumes circulated widely from the early 1880's through better than a decade of the Twentieth Century. Miss Libbey died in Brooklyn in 1924.

"Madolin Rivers, or The Little Beauty of Red Oak Seminary"\* wastes no time in getting off to a good start. The golden-haired heroine with lovely blue velvety eyes has escaped from her boarding school imprisonment, where as a<sup>n</sup> infant of unknown but distinguished parentage she had been consigned some sixteen-or-so years earlier. As she casually proceeds to a row-boat ride and stroll along the rocky shore, she comes suddenly upon a handsome dark young man asleep. He wakes just in time to save her from falling backward over the cliff in her maidenly amazement, in turn and on the instant he falls madly in love with her. But I must not spoil this encounter by depriving you of Miss Libbey's high-colored style, Miss Libbey's unparalleled tempo:

. . . he stirred impatiently, opened his eyes, and stared straight into Madolin's face.

Madolin uttered a little startled cry and took a step backward so near the edge of the treacherous, crumbling rock, that the slightest move would have precipitated her down into the water below.

All in an instant the young man seemed to realize the thrill-

\* J.S. Ogilvie Publishing Company, New York 1886.



There overcoming insuperable obstacles to rescue the desperate  
deline from death or worse, the money flowing with magnificent  
abandon, the impossible twist in the plot to supply more, and  
then again one more extra bit of suspense by way of suspense to  
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swung straight into Madolin's face.  
Madolin uttered a little startled cry and took a step back-  
ward to meet the edge of the tremendous, crumbling rock, that  
the slightest move would have precipitated her down into the  
water below.  
All in an instant the young man seemed to realize the truth.



ing horror of her perilous position-- that it was no vision, but a flesh-and-blood reality standing before him in the utmost peril, and like a flash he leaped to his feet, crying excitedly: "Great Heaven! don't attempt to move or you will go over the rocks, and that would be certain death!" Another instant, and he had hurriedly caught Madolin in his arms and drew her to safety.

For a single instant the blue eyes, so full of fright, met the gaze of her brilliant dark ones, and with her fair face suffused with blushes and too confused to find words in which to thank him for his timely assistance, Madolin struggled out of the stranger's arms.

"I -- I never dreamed that any one was here," said the girl, drawing back, the rosy blushes growing still rosier under the clear white light of the moon. "I never remember seeing a stranger here before, and-- and-- you startled me."

"I am very sorry," he said with a winning smile, "sorry for two reasons; first because I startled you, and secondly, because I am a stranger to you." And there was a look in his dancing eyes that Madolin could not quite understand . . . (p.14)

Gallantly the young gentleman offers to assist her back to her boat, which, sure enough, they find the high tide has removed far off-shore and storm is rising. Nay, the seething waves begin even to swirl around the feet of this attractive couple, and Madolin wails, "Oh, we are lost!" meanwhile clinging to her companion "in abject terror." So they are marooned for a fair share of the night, and when at last Max Pierpont, living as he says at the Grange, leaves Madolin at her school door, it is too late to save her reputation. Frothing with virtuous rage, the ogress of a mistress turns the poor child away, lonely, unfriended into the terrors of the darkness. What indeed can she do but go at once to seek the help of her handsome rescuer? She takes the only course open to her, she finds her way to the door of the Grange,--the mansion, it goes without saying, of the wealthiest young man, the eligible young bachelor, of the locality. All of these start-







ling events have taken place within the brief compass of twenty-four pages. But necessarily there are more, and more startling, events to come. A maid-servant ushers the hapless maiden into the impressive mansion and seats her in a room of rather ominous character;

Five, ten minutes passed, yet the master of the Grange seemed in no hurry to make his appearance, and, partially overcoming her timidity by that time, she raised her eyes, glancing curiously about her.

It was a large, lofty room . . . with huge dark mahogany bookcases reaching from floor to ceiling . . . A thick green carpet covered the floor, and sunken deep into the heavy Brussels were dark crimson stains.

A rug had been thrown over them, which Madolin's restless feet had pushed aside. Several costly pictures hung here and there about the apartment, and Madolin noticed with wonder that one of them was turned with its face toward the wall; and directly beneath it, upon the satin paneling, was another crimson stain, like the imprint of a woman's hand, and over all lay the dust of years.

"I have shown you into the wrong room," said the servant-girl, pantingly, white to the very lips, and before Madolin could collect her scattered senses, the girl had hurriedly thrust her into another apartment on the opposite side of the corridor, but not an instant too soon, for in another moment, a tall, fair-haired, handsome young man stood upon the threshold, gazing intently at Madolin, with an air of well-bred surprise upon his cold, haughty face and flashing from his keen blue eyes.

"You inquired for the Master of the Grange," he said, slowly, "I am that person. What can I do for you?"

For a moment Madolin stood as if rooted to the spot. Her breath came and went in short, convulsive gasps, and the room seemed to be whirling around her. The man before her was a perfect stranger. (p. 24)

Withdrawing with all due haste, Madolin is overcome most of all by the sense that her gallant rescuer of the rocks has deceived her cruelly. She collapses beside the road, a sumptuous coach passes, and a woman leans out to recognize the fair, fainting damsel as none other than her long unseen daughter



ling events were taken place within the order of things  
last night. But naturally there are more, and more waiting  
events to come. A half-century before the night when into  
the laboratory rushed and passed her in a room of rather ordi-  
nary appearance.

Five, ten minutes passed, yet the master of the house seemed  
in no hurry to make his appearance, and, partially overcome  
her standing by that time, she raised her eyes, glancing out-  
only about her.  
It was a large, lofty room. With huge dark mahogany  
bookshelves reaching from floor to ceiling. A large  
green carpet covered the floor, and swans deep into the heavy  
curtains were dark velvet chairs.  
A rug had been thrown over them, which had been a long time  
left and was still. Several velvet chairs had been and  
there about the apartment, and Kadija noticed with wonder that  
one of them was covered with the two towels she had seen and dis-  
easily omitted it. When the velvet covering was another and  
she, like a woman of a woman's hand, and over all lay the  
just of years.  
"I have never seen the wrong room," said the servant-  
girl, pointing, while to the very light, and before Kadija  
could object, she withdrew, and the girl had left.  
Kadija was now standing apart on the opposite side of the  
apartment, but was no longer so alone, for in another moment  
a tall, fair-haired, handsome young man stood upon the thresh-  
old, looking intently at Kadija, with an air of well-known ac-  
quaintance. He said, laughing face and flashing from his eyes  
the glow of youth.  
"You are invited for the Master of the House," he said, after  
a moment's pause. "What am I to do?"  
For a moment Kadija stood as if rooted to the spot. Her  
heart was wild with joy, and she was, however, and she had  
needed to be waiting around her. The man before her was a  
perfect stranger.  
(p. 81)

Withdrawing with a little haste, Kadija, overcome with  
all by the sense that her gallant rescuer of the rocks had  
received her earnestly. The collision beside the road, a sur-  
prise soon passed, and a woman came out to recognize the girl.  
Kadija turned as none other than her long unseen daughter.



whom she had left to be cared for at Red Oak Seminary. The woman, whose past is perhaps too intricate to look into, has now married very well and assures the reviving Madolin she shall have every advantage as a millionaire's step-daughter. There are complications, to be sure, when the millionaire turns out to be Colonel Leslie, father of Irene, who was Madolin's arch-enemy at school. Irene loses no time in taking advantage of this unexpected propinquity under the paternal roof, particularly since Madolin appears to have attracted the interest of Max Pierpont, he being the guest at the Grange, the handsome rescuer, etc. Mad with jealousy, Irene plots her rival's death, an item which causes even the maid to swoon with horror. This nefarious business goes through to the extent that the Egyptian drug prepared by Irene and drunk by Madolin is sufficiently potent to simulate the effects of mortal extinction at the moment when Madolin is embraced in the arms of Max Pierpont during a particularly touching tableau. So Madolin is buried; but in a manner similar to the revival in Gertrude Atherton's tale, this is not the end of her yet by a long shot.

A curious feature of this Laura Jean Libbey is that once you get involved in her breath-taking progress from incredible to more incredible event you feel yourself being pulled along by the sheer fascination of rapid, blood-chilling activity. And I shall take it for granted that the reader of my more sober sentences is nonetheless mildly curious to know what can possibly happen to Madolin next.

Re-enter Rupert Cleveland, the villainous master of the



when the fact is so certain for as Ned Get Seminary. The  
woman, whose name is perhaps too intimate to be told, has  
not married very well and answers the revolving wheel in the  
house every afternoon as a substitute for a day's work. There  
are other people, as it were, whom the abolitionists have  
to be General Leslie, father of Irons, who was Hamilton's  
enemy at school. Irons does not like to be taken for a  
this answered somewhat under the paternal roof, but  
if such a thing occurs to have reached the interest of Ned  
Thompson, he being the Grand of the Orange, the husband of  
one. And with jealousy, Irons gives his rival's name, and  
then with a certain even the said to women with him. This  
abolition business goes through to the extent that the  
the first prepared by Irons and found by Hamilton is  
it seems to be the case of most of these abolitionists  
means that Hamilton is concerned in the case of Ned Thompson  
during a possibly feeling Hamilton. So Hamilton is  
but in a sense similar to the revival in Northern  
this, this is not the end of her yet by a long shot.  
A certain degree of this later than today is that once  
get involved in her house-keeping progress from the  
more incredible even you feel yourself being pulled along by  
the heavy foundation of rock, blood-dripping  
I shall not be for granted that the power of my  
sensation is somewhat ally curious to know what  
why happen to Hamilton next.  
He-comes before Cleveland, the abolition master of the



Grange. (What that exemplary young man, Max Pierpont, could have been doing in such company must go unanswered.) Cleveland knows that Madolin was buried with all her jewels on her, and goes with hireling accomplices to the fresh grave to avail himself of the obvious opportunity. Since the watchman is approaching at the worst possible moment, Madolin's mortal remains are spirited off in Rupert's carriage, and, as you must have expected, Madolin revives. The villain is only too delighted at this unforeseen turn of events, takes her home, and keeps her imprisoned, modestly hoping to extract a promise of marriage. She resists and escapes, only to return home to find her mother had expired upon hearing the news of her daughter's death. So Madolin is left at the mercy once more of that arch-enemy who had tried to contrive her death, Irene. Irene agrees to take her in provided she dye her hair and skin beyond any possible recognition. I am loathe to believe that you would want to leave her in this predicament.

Briefly then: Max Pierpont, whose heart has been buried with Madolin, nonetheless recognizes Irene's great passion for him, and approaches her with an honorable offer of marriage provided she will accept him without love, since his heart is dead. Irene is quite satisfied, and Max comes frequently to her house, feeling an inexplicable attraction to "Ivy Vining", Irene's maid. They have trysts in the park until the disguised Madolin has scruples to the effect that Max must be a very fickle young man, getting himself engaged to Irene after her-- Madolin's-- death, and at the same time carrying on with Irene's maid. The



Orange. (What that necessary young man, Max Elapont, could  
have been doing in such a case, I do not know.) (What  
and those that Rachel was united with all her jewels as far  
and gone with nothing as compared to the first grave to seal  
himself of the only opportunity. Since the wedding is  
arranged at the most possible moment, Rachel's moral re-  
main is not to be left in Elapont's hands, and, as you may  
have expected, Rachel's answer. The villain is only too deli-  
ed of the business of events, takes her time, and waits  
her opportunity, modestly hoping to extract a price for her  
the jewels and money, only to return home to find her mother  
and sister both hearing the news of her daughter's death. By  
Rachel is left at the mercy of the man of that evening who  
and tried to seduce her death, Elapont. There is reason to  
be in Rachel's life for her sake and also for her mother's  
satisfaction. I am sure to believe that you would want to  
leave her to the mercies of Elapont.

Rachel's answer, Max Elapont, whose heart has been united with  
Rachel, notwithstanding Elapont's great passion for her,  
and approaches her with an honorable offer of marriage now.  
She will accept him without love, since his heart is dead.  
There is a little hesitation, and Max Elapont frequently to her father,  
feeling as the old man, Elapont, to "My Father," Elapont's  
said. (There is a great deal of the old man's Elapont  
has been left to the old man, that Max must be a very little young  
man, feeling himself united to Elapont's father, Elapont's  
last, and at the same time carrying on with Elapont's last. The



circumstances would seem to be against him. At this moment Cleveland rediscovers Madolin and abducts her to an obscure village in Kentucky where her remonstrances are explained as the ravings of a mad wife. Meanwhile Max has broken with Irene, and somehow under the aegis of most beneficent coincidence, the entire cast arrives by devious courses at the Kentucky village, where once again Irene plots and nearly compasses Madolin's death by causing her to sprain her ankle and lie unconscious in the snowdrifts by a swelling brook. Confident in her final triumph, Irene tells Max the whole extraordinary story of Madolin's resurrection, abduction (twice), disguise and supposed decease even at the moment Madolin is being rescued again, this time by a kindly farmer. Inevitably, Max finds his long lost lady-love and they are about to be happily united when one final problem threatens to upset the halcyon conclusion. This is no less than that Max is the son of the villain who basely compromised Madolin's mother, causing Madolin's father to die of the shock, and Madolin had vowed to avenge her father's death, her mother's dishonor by breaking Max's heart. Fortunately Max had been present at the deathbed of the injured lady and heard her withdraw the oath she had extracted from the tearful Madolin. So he is able to set the tortured maiden's heart at rest. Nothing remains except that Irene turns on the gas in disgust and her father dies of grief on the spot. So everyone who deserves to be happy is happy in the end, and also one who does not deserve it. Rupert Cleveland, the abductor, murderer,







-- if we are to believe the evidence of the blood-bespattered room in the Grange-- and the grave-robber, is forgiven, for Madolin remembers he once saved her life, that being the memorable moment he had intended to strip her corpse of its jewels. Oh, well, these annoying details were never intended to be analysed and coordinated; Miss Libbey meant simply to close the exciting history on an exalted note of Christian piety. And so Max capitulates to the edifying request of his "forgiving little angel", and Rupert returns to his Grange in all the sweet odor of respectability.

Once Laura Jean Libbey has been allowed to speak for herself there seems little need of commentary. Personally I have plowed-- or been whirled-- through four of these effusions, carefully annotating and summarizing, something which Miss Libbey's contemporary readers never did, or they would have caught their favorite "Greatest Living Novelist" in the scurvy trick of repeating whole passages. In "Flirtations of a Beauty"\* published in 1890, only four years after "Madolin Rivers", we experience this thrilling scene for instance: Corabel has just come upon the handsome sleeping form of a young man, while she is engaged in a solitary ramble:

Corabel uttered a little startled cry, and took a step backward so near the edge of the treacherous, crumbling bluff, that the slightest move would have precipitated her down into the bay below.

All in an instant the young man seemed to realize the horror of her perilous position-- that the slim young creature, all in white, with floating golden hair was no vision, but a flesh and blood reality, standing before him in the utmost peril, and like a flash he leaped to his feet, crying excitedly:

\*

J.S. Ogilvie Publishing Company, New York 1890.







"Great Heaven! don't attempt to move, or you will go over the bluff, and that would be certain death." (p. 11)

Slightly reminiscent, isn't it? But what is really curious are the deviations from the original. For this time Corabel does fall over the cliff, and Paul has to rescue her hanging from a branch. Whereupon the dialogue between these two, clearly destined for each other by a kind if tempestuous fate, proceeds to repeat itself word for word from "Madolin Rivers":

"Believe me, I am more than sorry," he went on with a winning smile -- "sorry for two reasons: first, because I startled you; and secondly, because I am a stranger to you." And there was a look in the handsome, smiling face that little Corabel could not quite understand. (p. 12)

I suppose we shall never know how Miss Libbey worked out her intricate system of cross-reference. Did she keep a stock of exciting episodes on file, and pull them out one after another when so many years had elapsed since last using? Or did she actually remember these thrilling moments, and they rolled glibly off her pen, with just sufficient variation to fit the new tale? We shall never know, but it is rather a nice question.

I do not mean to suggest that Miss Libbey lacked inventiveness. It is only compassion for the long-suffering reader that prevents me from outlining the complexities of the plot in others of her books. Once, however, you grasp the principle that anything can happen and in abundance, the mere practical expression is not too important. Occasionally, very occasionally, this contriver of sheer sensation touches upon a moot point of



"I have never seen it before, or you will go over the  
bridge, and that will be certain death." (p. 12)

Slightly embarrassed, Sam's left hand was in his pocket  
and the Cavalier from the original. For this time General  
does not over the cliff, and Sam has to make his way  
from a person. Whereupon the dialogue between them is, almost  
if I should for each other by a kind of suggestion later, but  
needs to repeat itself word for word from "Nicholas Nickleby".

"Believe me, I am more than ready," he said to  
with a winning smile. "I am sorry for my remark; I am a  
I stepped out, and suddenly, because I am a coward, I  
And there was a look in his handsome, smiling face that  
General could not quite understand." (p. 13)

I suppose we shall never know how Miss Fanny looked out her  
intense system of cross-reference. Did she keep a record of  
existing episodes on this, and pull them out when they  
when so many years had passed since last meeting. He did not  
actually remember these thrilling moments, and they rolled

lightly off her head, with that unconscious wisdom to the  
new talent he shall never know, but it is rather a nice ques-  
tion.

I do not mean to suggest that Miss Fanny looked disappointed.  
It is only a question for the long-maturing reader that pro-  
cesses as they maintain the consistency of the plot in order  
of her home. And, however, you know the principle that  
something is given and is a substance, the more precisely it  
question is not too important. Consequently, very occasionally,  
this character of these sensitive fingers upon a spot of



the period, however. Paul Castleton has just rescued little Corabel, and circumstances have contrived to keep them out together, two complete strangers, far into the night. While naive little Corabel tells him she has had a thrilling adventure---

He bites his golden-brown mustache savagely. He is half inclined to resent that ignorance of innocence.

Strange thoughts flit through his busy brain-- thoughts that twenty-four hours ago he would have scouted.

Of what is he thinking, she wonders, that he looks so vexedly out over the dimpling, sun-kissed waves-- of the way the predicament may affect her she never dreams. . . .

He averted his face, asking abruptly:

"How would you like a home of your own, Corabel? If, through my imprudence you have lost one home-- as I am sure, from the description I glean from you of your stern aunt, you most assuredly will-- I must provide you with another, and it can be done in only one way-- I must marry you." (p. 16)

To suggest resentment of "that ignorance of innocence", to bring up the problems of marriages demanded by convention when circumstances had compromised a woman's honor-- these are becoming heavy freight for Miss Libbey's light craft to bear. Nonetheless, they serve as indications of the serious trend of thought of the times when even this most popular of popular novelists introduces the questions into her rapidly moving plots. Paul did not want to marry Corabel, and yet he had to. Happily in the end, after many untoward events, which you may look up for yourself, he finds that he does love his faithful long-suffering little Corabel after all!

It is obvious by now that what Miss Libbey most represents is the passion for melodrama which serves the Victorians the twofold purpose of escaping from the dullness of circumstance



The period, however, Paul Gasterman was just married little  
Gasterman, and circumstances have conspired to keep them out of  
sight, and complete strangers for the night. While  
native little Gasterman tells him she has had a thrilling expe-

He then his half-brother, and the advantage. He is half in-  
clined to regard this statement as impossible.  
Gasterman explains this through his long history--thinks that  
everybody knows the truth about his family.  
Of that I am certain, this woman, who looks so pretty  
and over the things, and I am sure--at the very least--  
Gasterman was right, but he never knows.  
He wanted his wife, and he wanted to  
"How could you like a man of your own, Gasterman? It is through  
my imagination you have lost your mind--as I am sure, from the  
description I have given you of your own man, you must be  
crazy with--I must provide you with another, and it can be  
done in only one way--I must marry you." (p. 12)

To suggest a statement of "this ignorance of Gasterman," to  
bring up the question of marriage demanded by convention when  
Gasterman had recognized a woman's right--these are the  
points I must mention for Miss Liberty's light must be seen.  
Gasterman, then, came as a revelation of the system of  
thought of the time when even this most popular of popular  
novels introduced the question into her rapidly moving  
plots. Paul had not yet to marry Gasterman, and yet he had to  
marry in the end, after many untold adventures, which you may  
look up for yourself, he finds that he does love his faithful  
long-suffering wife Gasterman after all.  
It is obvious by now that Miss Liberty's most important  
the pastor for whom she was the Victorian and the  
old system of marriage from the beginning of the nineteenth



and also of letting off much otherwise repressed steam. No one better than this author can convey the effect of the stage of the period. Since the tempo is rapid, I trust the reader will be able to endure a fairly extensive quotation.

Trixy, the versatile villainess of "Flirtations of a Beauty", has summoned her father to tell him of her husband's desertion:

"Father," she said, with a shrill, hysterical laugh-- more cruel to hear than the wildest grief could have been-- "my husband has left me forever-- has gone away out of my life-- wilfully deserted me-- what am I to do?"

The old miller fell back thunderstruck.

Of all the possible evils or events this had never dawned across him.

He quite believed he had not heard aright.

He was literally speechless.

He sunk down on the nearest seat, and Beatrix quivering with emotion, fell on a hassock at his feet.

"I have sent for you to take me home, papa," she said hoarsely. "Don't ask me any questions about it . . . . When they broke the news to me I went mad almost; all that day and the next day they watched me lest I should commit suicide I was so frantic."

The old miller's face had grown strangely white as he listened to Trixy's wild, disconnected story; at its close he started to his feet, with eyes fairly blazing, the veins on his forehead standing out like whipcords, uttering the deepest curses and hurling the most terrible maledictions that ever fell from a man's lips.

Never before in all the years of his life had the good-natured old miller been worked up to such a pitch of indignation, rage and mighty fury.

He strode up and down the length of the room, his honest, toil-hardened hand clinched tight, spots of foam flecking his stern, set, rigid lips, and his blazing eyes flashed luridly.

Beatrix had never seen her father like this before; for one awful moment she believed rage had driven him mad.

He snatched his hat and cane, and started toward the door, but Trixy sprang forward quickly intercepting him.

"Where are you going, papa?" she cried in wild alarm.

"I am going to find this man who has married my daughter and dared to desert her!" he cried furiously. "I will hunt the world through until I find him, and then there will be a scene between us those who witness it will never forget."

"You will not kill him!" she cried. "You will not kill him, papa?"



and after of looking off such spectacles represented death. To me  
better than this author can convey the effect of the story of  
the people. Since the tempo is rapid, I trust the reader will  
be able to endure a fairly extensive quotation.  
Truly, the veritable villainess of "Tirpaticum of a Beauty".  
has answered her father he tell him of her husband's seduction:

"Father," she said, with a shrill, hysterical laugh--more  
cruel to hear than the wildest gales could have been--"my  
husband has left me forever--has gone away out of my life--  
wilfully deserted me--just as I do!"  
The old man fell back thunderstruck.  
Of all the possible evils to events this had never dreamed  
anyone him.

He quite believed he had not heard right.  
He was literally speechless.  
He took down on the nearest seat, and looked on, wondering with  
emotion, till on a look at his feet.  
"I have sent for you to take me home, papa," and said hoarse-  
ly. "Don't ask me any questions about it. When they  
broke the news to me I went mad almost; all that day and the  
next day they watched me lest I should commit suicide I was so  
frantic."  
The old man's face had grown steadily white as he listened  
to his wife's wild, disconnected story; at last when he started  
up to his feet, with eyes wildly staring, the veins on his temples  
bead sweating and like whiplashes, striking the deepest shadows  
and making the most terrible sensations that ever fell from  
a man's lips.

Never before in all the years of his life had the good-natured  
old man been worked up to such a pitch of indignation, rage  
and angry fury.  
He stood up and took the length of the room, his head, still  
reverted head tilted high, eyes of fire flashing in them,  
and, rigid lips, and his glowing eyes flared in fury.  
He never had never seen her father like this before; for one  
moment he believed that he had killed him.  
He watched his mad and cold, and started toward the door, but  
before he could get to the door he was stopped.  
"Where are you going, papa?" she asked in wild shriek.  
"I am going to find the man who has married my daughter and  
drive to death!" he cried furiously. "I will hunt the  
world through until I find him, and then there will be a scene  
between us such as witness it will never forget."  
"You will not kill him!" she cried. "You will not kill him!"  
papa?



"Kill him!" cried the old miller; "I would lash him to death, I would shake the life out of him without giving him time to utter a word!"

Beatrice Castleton trembled like a leaf in the storm before the mighty fury of her father's horrible rage.

"I am going out to find the man who has ruined your happiness -- to shoot him on sight like a dog," repeated Mr. Valentine, hotly. "He will have no time to utter a prayer or a moan; your father will avenge your wrongs, my little Trixy."

Trixy's dark eyes dilated, her glorious face grew deadly white, and the clinched jeweled hands clung to him all the tighter.

(pp. 152-4)

If it is melodrama the reader wants, it could hardly be done better. Oh, what days those were! How incapable we are of identifying ourselves with the temper of the times which could consume such mock heroics in utter seriousness. Miss Libbey offers the most faithful transcript of emotionalized play-acting in print which I have been able to find. From being despised as contemptible low-class stuff, she may yet emerge as an invaluable chronicler of a period which is unique in its taste for histrionics.

There is one other Victorian convention on the aesthetic side which is worth mentioning before we leave Miss Libbey. We have seen how our grandmothers admired posing, motion in the grand manner, the sweeping line of the human figure whether simply for itself or as indicative of emotion. Even as we have found this quiescence or activity described in terms of the animal metaphor, we shall also come upon it constantly in terms of statuary. Miss Libbey is not obtuse to this favorite effect. Comes an excruciating moment when the deserted bride describes her emotions, and her confidante comes over to express her sympathy in this unusual-- to us--fashion, "stand-







ing before her like a beautiful statue carved in marble".\*

The poor man, who is a polygamist only because he has been run over by a coach and has lost his memory, is now confronted with his two wives, and is told to choose between them. Izetta, being the first wedded and the hapless little orphan besides, has the sympathy of the reader and is therefore allowed to enjoy the spotlight of this sculpturesque charm: "Like a beautiful marble statue she stood before him, yet she spoke no word." (p.207)

Only two pages previous, Izetta at the encounter, with the irate, about-to-be-repudiated mother-in-law present for good measure, "stood up proudly before them, calm as a marble statue." (p. 205)

Once Miss Libbey conceives of an effect we cannot accuse her of letting it suffer from neglect. To do her justice, elsewhere in the later books I do not find this simile overworked. Or perhaps she found the highbrow tone too difficult to maintain, for this statuesque note is not of the popular variety; it occurs throughout *Ellen Glasgow*, and is constantly bobbing up in the serious works of fiction right to the edge of the new world after 1914. It seems to lend "the imperial grace of a queen" which Miss Libbey also notes (p. 207).

But queens now are dead,-- and their grace with them. And gone, too, with the passing of the imperial pattern, are the pathetic, ludicrous pretensions of the world's little people which Laura Jean Libbey has preserved for us in her mad, tear-

\*"A Fatal Wooing" by Laura Jean Libbey. Street and Smith Corporation, New York, 1899. p. 178.



the picture has like a beautiful statue carved in marble.  
The poet, who is a polyglot only because he has been run  
over by a coach and has lost his memory, is now conversed with  
his two wives, and is told in rhyme between them, Justice, de-  
ing the three ladies and the ladies little cousin Justice, and  
the sympathy of the reader and in the end is allowed to enjoy the  
apocryphal of this sympathetic drama "Little a beautiful woman  
and she stood before him, her eyes no more." (p. 202)  
Only two pages previous, Justice at the conclusion, with the  
last, about the sympathy of the reader in the present for good  
measures, "stood up proudly before them, calm as a marble  
statue." (p. 202)

From Miss Libby comes a series of an effect we cannot measure her  
of looking at letters from England. To her husband, also,  
where in the last book I do not find this little over-  
or perhaps she found the highway some too difficult to win-  
tail, for the husband's note is not of the popular variety;  
is about the same, and Miss Libby and her husband's position  
up in the world, where at first, on the edge of the  
new world after 1848. It seems to me "the liberal sense of  
a poet," which Miss Libby also notes (p. 202).

But poems are not dead, -- and their gates with them. And  
gone, too, with the passing of the Imperial past, are the  
poets, the poets of the world's little people  
which Miss Libby has preserved for us in her new, "The  
"A Great Poet," by John Libby, Boston and New York, 1899.  
Boston, New York, 1899. p. 172.



ing, impossible pageant of what the underprivileged would like to have been and done in those quiet years before the First World War.



and, therefore, the legend of the underworld world is  
to have been and does in those cases where the  
world is.



## CHAPTER V

"That ignorance of innocence" theme demonstrated in caricature by Laura Jean Libbey finds its most serious and artistic exponent in Edith Wharton, writing necessarily not at the moment the ideal was in fullest flower, but after the peak when occurs the re-evaluation of the process and the product. This surely is one of the more curious pages in social history when women, sheltered as the moral and physical vehicle of the race, were hemmed around with proscriptions forbidding them to know the workings of their very essential function. The reason for this carefully calculated system appears to have been that women were such delicate creatures-- and lovely because they were delicate -- that they could not bear the burden of knowledge, which permitted would destroy the precious womanly values they were designed to embody. Life was conceded an ugly thing, and to keep its ugliness within bounds the mask of pretence must be maintained, while some at least, the sheltered women, should enjoy the fool's paradise of not viewing the shattering facts.

That any such system could be devised and sustained seems all but incredible, and yet the conspiracy of silence as a social force succeeded to a degree and over a long period. Mrs. Wharton in her autobiography\* refers to the isolation of women in

\*"A Backward Glance" by Edith Wharton. D. Appleton- Century Company, New York 1934. p. 14.







its earliest stages with a commentary on Sir Walter Scott's inability to present a lifelike portrait of a woman of his own class. There were gentlemen and there were ladies, but the men's sphere was the world at large, while the ladies' business was to stay out of that world, specifically to remain in utter ignorance of it, while they bore the children, ran their homes and enjoyed-- as some did-- a total helplessness in fact and in theory beyond their own four walls. Men protected the privileged few in this position, and the women acquiesced, maintaining its principles over their daughters by education and prohibition to perpetuate this very precarious regime. Scott, Mrs. Wharton observes, actually did not know the women of his world well enough to present them; they had no features, no individuality to him, remaining a vague generalization of the domestic scene. Such is the background of the Victorian woman, valuable in pointing up the strictures and the strains, and the long strides taken before the period was over.

It may be possible to forbid knowledge, but it is not possible, where the life of intelligence is involved, to hide the fact that knowledge is being withheld. Always before our grandmothers' mental vision loomed a blank wall with untold terrors behind it. The Victorian lady was a timid creature, trained in swoonings, in nervous flutters, in continual hesitations and deprecations. To come to grips with facts was to belie, to undermine her position; to be courageous and candid, if it were conceivable, would amount to being coarse, destructive of perhaps the most elaborate system of prohibitions ever devised



its highest degree with a commentary on the famous motto of the  
ability to present a lifelike portrait of a woman of his own  
class. There were gentlemen and there were ladies, but the  
men's sphere was the world at large, while the ladies' business  
was to stay out of that world, especially to remain in the  
ignorance of it, while they bore the children, and their home  
and enjoyed--as was said--a total independence in fact and in  
theory, beyond their own four walls. But protected by the  
power of this position, and the woman's weakness, which  
causing the gentleman to bear the burden of education and  
protection to her estate, she was very practical, active, and  
Mrs. Norton answered, emphatically that she was the woman of the  
world well known to her own class; they had no business, no  
indulgence to give, retaining a very generalization of the  
female name. But in the background of the Victorian woman,  
valuable in relation to the gentleman and the nation, and the  
lady's sphere, her business was to be seen.  
It is a mistake to say the Victorian lady is not a  
life, and the life of the Victorian lady is to be seen.  
The Victorian lady is being educated. Always before her eyes  
and her mind's eye is a blank with which she is  
filled. The Victorian lady with a kind of order, which  
in everything, in her own life, in a general position and  
position. To come to grips with these was to be able to  
understand her position, to be understood and to be  
very successful. Would you want to be a man, a woman of  
the Victorian lady's sphere of influence and even divided



in this weary world's efforts to achieve an ideal of something better than it has at hand.

Before we proceed to the tearing away of the veil, the revelation of the Gorgon's head-- which the Countess Olenska in "The Age of Innocence" admits having experienced-- we should meet briefly a sympathetic portrait of the vanished hyper-sensitized type so well known in our grandmothers' day. Nearly ten years before Mrs. Stowe turned her pen in wrath against the selfish affectations and contrivings of the very feminine Lillie Ellis, she had presented two exquisite, spiritual, uplifting and endearing little things in "The Pearl of Orr's Island".\* Here is such a woman in the heroine's mother at the outset of the tale:

Her hair was black, and smoothly parted on a broad forehead, to which a pair of penciled dark eyebrows gave a striking and definite outline. Beneath, lay a pair of large black eyes, remarkable for tremulous expression of melancholy and timidity. The cheek was white and bloodless as a snowberry, though with the clear and perfect oval of good health; the mouth was delicately formed, with a certain sad quiet in its lines, which indicated a habitually repressed and sensitive nature. . . . On the whole, she impressed one like those fragile wild-flowers which in April cast their fluttering shadows from the mossy crevices of the old New England granite . . . (p. 1-2)

Clearly this little creature is designed for suffering and for exerting the most poignant appeal of suffering in silence. The ship, which is bringing the man she loves home after a long voyage, is just coming in to harbor. She sights it.

\* First copyright 1862 by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Houghton Mifflin 1896.







The young woman was one of the sort that never start, and never exclaim, but with all the deeper emotions grow still. The color slowly mounted into her cheek, her lips parted, and her eyes dilated with a wide, bright expression; her breathing came in quick gasps, but she said nothing. (p. 3)

Then in full sight of shore the ship struck a reef and went down.

The woman lifted up no voice, but, as one who has been shot through the heart falls with no cry, she fell back,-- a mist rose up over her great mournful eyes,-- she had fainted. (p.4)

To conclude this little lady's brief history, she died that night giving birth to her child, Mara, who proceeds in much the same vein to an equally wistful early death.-- Now these women are not wholly unattractive. So long as their characteristics are personal attributes and not assumed for the sake of belonging to the favorite feminine type of the day, they can be liked, loved or tolerated as one's taste dictates. The trouble with the Victorian scheme was that it appeared set upon creating a race of such women, culminating in the apotheosis of artificiality. Mrs. Wharton undertakes to give the situation a thorough airing.

Having flouted her family's indignation at anything so vulgar as authorship in a woman, Mrs. Wharton continues to carry over her defiance into the realm of literary convention. In her "Backward Glance" she describes the intolerable set-up which excluded from young people's reading matter any discussion of serious import, recalling the terms of a contract offered her, with handsome remuneration, provided she exclude any reference







to "an unlawful attachment". (p. 126) But Mrs. Wharton was determined to be done once and for all with "the wooden dolls" out of which she and her contemporary authors in the English speaking countries were expected to make a world of make-believe. She had a volcanic situation at hand and she made the best of it.

Charity Royall, heroine of "Summer",\* serves as the touchstone to reveal the pitfalls and barricades surrounding a helpless and undefended girl in those sheltered days. Charity has been taken into the household of Lawyer Royall, she being an unwanted child of indigent parents farther up the mountain. She is half daughter, half servant, and fares well enough till Mrs. Royall dies; then the old man is "lonely" and attempts to invade Charity's room at night. She realizes she must find independence, and turns to Miss Hatchard who could give her a position in the town library. Charity explains:

"I want to earn money enough to get away."

"To get away?" Miss Hatchard's puzzled wrinkles deepened, and there was a distressful pause. "You want to leave Mr. Royall?"

"Yes! or I want another woman in the house with me," said Charity resolutely.

Miss Hatchard clasped her nervous hands about the arms of her chair. Her eyes invoked the faded countenances on the wall, and after a faint cough of indecision she brought out: "The . . . the housework's too much for you, I suppose?"

Charity's heart grew cold. She understood that Miss Hatchard had no help to give her and that she would have to fight her way out of her difficulties alone. A deeper sense of isolation overcame her; she felt incalculably old. "She's got to be talked to like a baby," she thought, with a feeling of compassion for Miss Hatchard's long immaturity. "Yes, that's it," she said aloud. "The housework's too hard for me." (pp. 30-1)

\*"Summer," A Novel, by Edith Wharton. D. Appleton & Company, New York 1917.







Such was the system of the "sheltered life", rendering some women incapable of confronting reality, perhaps in many cases actually uninformed as to its nature; and in other cases leaving the helpless to be victimized, over which resolutely the veils of obscurity were drawn.

It is not until 1920 that Mrs. Wharton enters upon a thorough analysis of the problem in her masterpiece-- she has others besides-- "The Age of Innocence"<sup>\*</sup>. With characteristic poise, she does not hesitate to present the charms of innocence even when undertaking an exposure of its dangerous limitations. Newland Archer, very correct young man about town, having just emerged from an affair with a married woman, is now enjoying the safe social haven of engagement to May Welland, as unexceptionable a young woman as conservative New York society could mold. Watching his fiancée during certain suggestive passages of the opera, he is touched and pleased at the certainty that gross insinuations can awaken no glimmer of recognition in the depths of her "abysmal purity". He is aware of a certain sense of superiority due to his "masculine initiation", he loves her for this same purity, but he cannot forbear speculation as to how such a woman will develop once she has to open her eyes on the world as it is. His companion of a life-time must be capable of worldly wisdom, yet she must remain unspotted by a sordid world. How, he wonders, can this "miracle of fire and ice" be achieved.

<sup>\*</sup>"The Age of Innocence" by Edith Wharton. D. Appleton Company, New York 1920.



...and the system of the "abolished life", remaining now  
...of the abolitionist family, though in many cases  
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It is not until 1850 that Mrs. Weston enters upon a more  
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In this "hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs", Archer debates with himself as to how he and May are to come to the thorough understanding and sympathy which he expects of his marriage.

What could he and she really know of each other, since it was his duty, as a "decent" fellow, to conceal his past from her, and hers, as a marriageable girl, to have no past to conceal? (p. 41)

He knows what qualities he wants to find in his wife, but shudders at the thought that all her past education has been devised to defeat any first gropings of maturity in her character:

. . . on her part (she should have) the experience, the versatility, the freedom of judgment, which she had been carefully trained not to possess; and with a shiver of foreboding he saw his marriage becoming what most of the other marriages about him were: a dull association of material and social interests held together by ignorance on the one side and hypocrisy on the other. (p. 41)

The enigma of the young woman, charming, attractive, well-born, who is to enter his life in the most intimate and powerful capacity as his wife, finally resolves itself into the disturbing realization that she is unknown to him because she is unknowable. Her nature so far is utterly shallow, because nothing had been permitted to enter her consciousness which could stir its depths.

The young girl who was the centre of this elaborate system of mystification remained the more inscrutable for her very frankness and assurance. She was frank, poor dear, because she had nothing to conceal, assured because she knew of nothing to be on her guard against; and with no better preparation than



In this "intermediate" world, where the real thing was never  
 said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of  
 arbitrary signs, a person's behavior with himself as to how he had  
 may now be seen to the thorough understanding and sympathy which  
 he expects of his marriage.

What could he and the really know of each other, since it was  
 his duty as a "husband" to conceal his past from her, and  
 hers, as a respectable girl, to have no part to conceal? (p. 41)

He knows what questions he wants to find in his wife, but she  
 does at the time that all her past education has been devised  
 to defeat any first glimpse of reality in her character.

As her past (she should have) the experience, the  
 versatility, the freedom of judgment, which she had been care-  
 fully trained not to possess; and with a desire of forgetting  
 he saw his marriage becoming what most of the other marriages  
 about him were: a dull association of respect and social in-  
 terests held together by ignorance of the real side and hypocrisy  
 on the other. (p. 42)

The origin of the young woman, character, education, call-  
 ing, who is so eager for life in the most intimate and person-  
 al aspects of life, is largely hidden from herself and the  
 things of this world that she is unknown to his heart, and is  
 unknown to her. Her nature is in a way a child, because  
 nothing had been permitted to enter her consciousness which  
 could not be denied.

The young girl who was the center of this elaborate system  
 of deception remained the most inaccessible for her own  
 freedom and pleasure. She was there, poor girl, because she  
 had nothing to conceal, except because she knew of nothing to  
 be in her world against, and with no better preparation than



this, she was to be plunged overnight into what people evasively called "the facts of life". (pp. 42-3)

Supposedly under such a system the men enjoyed all the privileges and the women all the restrictions. This time-honored fallacy Mrs. Wharton's keen vision shatters into a thousand bits. Newland Archer is sincere in his quest for a woman capable of sharing his life in its deepest and most varied interests. It is because he does not know May and realizes he cannot know her in her present phase that he is disturbed at the uncertain prospects of marriage with her. It is at this moment that May's cousin, the Countess Olenska, in flight from an intolerable marriage in Europe, arrives upon their quiet New York scene. The mystery which surrounds Ellen Olenska is the exact opposite of the mystery which surrounds May. Ellen appears incapable of surprise; so much, and so much that is horrible, has happened to her that a curious calm of unspeakable depths speaks from her eyes. Archer is uneasily aware of a strange attraction to this woman, but being a man of honor and engaged to May, he breaks his chain of meetings with the Countess and seeks refuge in a visit to his fiancée in Florida. His first kiss, expressing as it does his surcharged emotions, startles and disturbs her; she draws back, "shaken out of her cool boyish composure". He realizes his error, withdraws within himself and restores May's expression "to the vacant serenity of a young marble athlete".

"Tell me what you do all day," he said, crossing his arms under his tilted-back head, and pushing his hat forward to



which she was to be changed eventually into what people eventually  
 is called "the Island of the" (pp. 42-3)

Unhappily, when such a system was enjoyed all the while

leaves and the women all the rest of the time. This was the

history of the women's lives. When they were in a

state, the women were in a state of the

side of the life in its history and was very

also. It is because we do not know how and what we

know has in her present phase that he is interested in the

also progress of the life with her. It is in this sense that

the women, the women's lives, in light of the

also progress in Europe, and upon their

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of a young woman's life.

"This is what you do all day," he said, crossing his arms  
 under his chin and looking at her.



screen the sun-dazzle. To let her talk about familiar and simple things was the easiest way of carrying on his own independent train of thought; and he sat listening to her simple chronicle of swimming, sailing and riding, varied by an occasional dance . . . (p. 141)

Obviously there is more involved here than the defenceless misery of womankind, for the women were at least in part unaware of their misery; while the men, under this pernicious system of refusing to allow women to achieve maturity, were continually deprived of satisfactory communication with those who were most closely bound up in their lives. There are more extenuating circumstances than have yet been properly reckoned with, as regards the reputed waywardness of Victorian men. If the virtuous women knew nothing and refused to know anything of the serious problems of life, how could the men be expected to find intellectual, emotional, spiritual satisfaction at home? It was far from a woman's problem merely, this of wrapping the woman's consciousness in cotton wool. Archer knew it;

Ah, no, he did not want May to have that kind of innocence, the innocence that seals the mind against imagination and the heart against experience! (p. 145)

But the system under which May had been brought up was too strong for them. At the very moment when Archer feels his love for Ellen Olenska must sweep everything before it, it is Ellen herself who reminds him that as a man of honor he must keep his word with May. So they are married and travel and May gives great attention to the exigencies of a perfect wardrobe, in which serious pursuit Archer recognizes another facet of the







bewildering problem. Pondering "the religious reverence of even the most unworldly American women for the social advantages of dress", he concludes:

"It's their armour, their defence against the unknown, and their defiance of it." And he understood for the first time the earnestness with which May, who was incapable of tying a ribbon in her hair to charm him, had gone through the solemn rite of selecting and ordering her extensive wardrobe. (pp.198-9)

The armor is in all ways effectively maintained. May does not appear hopelessly shallow, and it is the awareness that she should have depths, though they resist stirring, which most baffles her husband. The curtain which was drawn over her consciousness by her girlhood training will not be lifted, he knows he has never seen beyond it. -- Several years after their marriage when May is distinguishing herself as a beauty in the archery contests at Newport, Archer notes with pride that she looks as Diana-like as she did on the evening of their engagement. And yet he cannot solve this enigma of continued immaturity.

In the interval not a thought seemed to have passed behind her eyes or a feeling through her heart; and though her husband knew that she had the capacity for both he marvelled afresh at the way in which experience dropped away from her . . . What if "niceness" carried to that supreme degree were only a negation, the curtain dropped before an emptiness? (pp. 211-12)

May never changes; she is loyal, loving, but apparently incapable of realizing the breadth and the depth of life which waits all around, which clamors for admission into any open mind. Finally, she is the center of a tragedy without taking



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cognizance of it herself:

Generous, faithful, unwearied . . . (she was) so lacking in imagination, so incapable of growth, that the world of her youth had fallen into pieces and rebuilt itself without her ever being conscious of the change. This hard bright blindness had kept her immediate horizon apparently unaltered. Her incapacity to recognize change made her children conceal their views from her as Archer concealed his; there had been from the first, a joint pretence of sameness, a kind of innocent family hypocrisy, in which father and children had unconsciously collaborated. (p. 351)

Over against this very recognizable American type, Ellen Olenska shines with disturbing brilliance. She is the American who has been subjected to the peculiar development of European experience which Europe had to offer us when Europe could still enjoy the flowering of centuries of culture and we were still, culturally and socially speaking, an amorphous, adolescent nation. Mrs. Wharton is fond of this theme, as was Henry James; she introduces it first in a slight novel, "Madame de Treymes"\* whose expatriate American, Madame de Malrive, exemplifies something of that subtle grace which we as Americans seem so slow to acquire. -- Do not accuse me of being false to my own kind! Even at this moment when Europe is in ashes I maintain we are looking toward<sup>to</sup> the day Paris revives once more as the ultimate arbiter elegantarium of things feminine and alluring. Do we not import what finished products of European culture we can find for our theatre and our screen, and without them would there not be a sad lack of personality plus for our wondering delectation? Tush! I do not apologize for the fact that we are a young and a polyglot nation; I recog-

\* Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1907.







nize it in its fullest implications, and rejoice in the fact that I am an American, but an American with my eyes open, unhampered by the provincialism which will not see that the fullest possibilities of social life here are far from developed. Personality is the finest flower of disciplined, social, aesthetic ideals; we are a casual, spontaneous, energetic, good-hearted people, but still something remains to be desired. A picture of what that something may be is presented by Mrs. Wharton in *Madame de Malrive*, from its beginnings to its ultimate development. As a young American girl, Fanny Frisbee --

was especially dashing; she had the showiest national attributes, tempered only by a native grace of softness, as the beam of her eyes was subdued by the length of her lashes. And yet young Durham, though not unsusceptible to such charms, had remained content to enjoy them at a safe distance of good fellowship. If he had been asked why, he could not have told; but the Durham of forty understood. It was because there were, with minor modifications, many other Fanny Frisbees . . .

(p. 33)

As *Madame de Malrive*, the subtle transformation has taken place:

It was the mystery, the sense of unprobed depths of initiation, which drew him to her as her freshness had never drawn him . . . it was the finish, the modelling, which *Madame de Malrive's* experience had given her that set her apart from the fresh uncomplicated personalities of which she had once been simply the most charming type. The influences that had lowered her voice, regulated her gestures, toned her down to harmony with the warm dim background of a long social past--these influences had lent to her natural fineness of perception a command of expression adapted to complex conditions. She had moved in surroundings through which one could hardly bounce and bang on the general American plan without knocking the angles off a number of sacred institutions; and her acquired dexterity of movement seemed to Durham a crowning grace.

(pp. 34-6)



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At this moment there may be some readers who would enjoy burning Mrs. Wharton in effigy and flaying the present writer alive. Spare at least Mrs. Wharton. For it is characteristic of that novelist's balanced vision that she invariably presents both sides of the picture. Madame de Malrive, enhanced as she appears by her European life, has her own nostalgia for the land of her birth. If the richer European air is still implied in this lady's demonstrations of patriotism, it is simply one of those facts which Mrs. Wharton sees and cannot waive. The plea for a certain clean quality in the atmosphere of the New World is sincere and convincing. Madame de Malrive, after fifteen years uninterrupted of Europe, exclaims her relief at meeting American friends:

"To be with dear, good, sweet, simple, real Americans again!" she burst out, heaping up her epithets with reckless prodigality . . . "It means-- it means . . . that I'm safe with them: as safe as in a bank!" (p. 23)

She goes on in like vein to expatiate upon the long lost delight of breathing "that clear American air where there are no obscurities, no mysteries . . ."

Madame de Malrive had reason to value our simple, candid, generous American way, for she found herself a victim to the stringent European sense of family before all, regardless of the merits or demerits of the individual member. She was made to suffer. And the bitter lesson which Mrs. Wharton draws from this contrast between the American and European type of woman is simply that the European woman has more depth and more charm







due to her very intimate pain of experience. In comparison, the American woman is sheltered, pampered, and therefore shallow.

The subtle means by which Mrs. Wharton, through the long development of the plot in "The Age of Innocence", conveys the charm of Ellen Olenska is not conducive to quotation. Slowly the devastating fact of Archer's marriage to a woman who remains a stranger, while the abounding understanding and sympathy of his wife's cousin, the Countess, is his and yet not fully his, dawns upon him. It is Ellen in the end as in the beginning who insists over many a precarious moment, that he remain faithful to his wife. Now therodomontade of romantic passion is muted, and the intensity of the most exquisite and complete communication is quietly conveyed:

He had known the love that is fed on caresses and feeds them; but this passion that was closer than his bones was not superficially satisfied. His one terror was to do anything which might efface the sound and impression of her words, his one thought, that he should never again feel quite alone. (p. 245)

The ideal of the woman who is too sensitive to confront and to share the awareness of life is shattered. She was, probably in many instances, a lovely creature. But she was by the very circumstances of her creation incapable of growth, and in the worst instances suffered a curious, ingrown tendency which forced her further and further back into the retreats devised by her inculcated timidity. Dangerous to herself and to society, the repudiation of her faults has entailed some losses with it. We could well afford to recover some sensitivities



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unknown to us today, I do not doubt, if only for the purpose of recovering a more subtle charm than is always to be found in candor. The freedom of speech which Mrs. Wharton took unto herself was achieved with a vengeance until she finds cause to lament "the freedom of speech which never arrived at wit and the freedom of act which never made for romance."\* In reviewing the trend of the time over which she wrote, she finds that she and her fellow-authors who battled to break down the prohibitions forbidding an honest discussion of life in literature, meanwhile suffering ugly recriminations from the horrified public, were avenged:

. . . and more than avenged, not only by life but by the novelists, and I hope the latter will see before long that it is as hard to get dramatic interest out of a mob of irresponsible criminals as out of the Puritan marionettes who framed our stock-in-trade. Authentic human nature lies somewhere between the two, and is always there for a new great novelist to rediscover. (p. 127)

The Age of Innocence is over. It remains to be seen what the imagination can do in sifting the facts of life, computing and ordering them into a system of vitalizing significance for a later day.

\* "The House of Mirth" by Edith Wharton. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1905. p. 347.



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## CHAPTER VI

The correlation between money and morals is a fact which the moralists have been slow to recognize. Since women in the Victorian period and even later were conceded no economic independence they were often very hard put to it to preserve their morals. We have seen in the case of the little country girl, Charity Royall, how precarious the integrity of the penniless woman was. A similar and more memorable instance is that of Mattie Silver in "Ethan Frome".\* Mattie was a good girl, the poor relation of Ethan's forbidding wife, who had taken Mattie into her house as "help"; when about to be dismissed because Ethan loved her, Mattie found herself confronted with the situation, no less desperate because it was common in those days, of where to turn for home and a meagre living.

It was, moreover, not a simple case of economic pressure that persecuted these women. Inevitably involved was the necessity of preserving appearances. Suspicion hemmed them in on all sides; and for this reason, if for no other, the Victorian insistence on "respectability" can be understood as a sine qua non of survival. Since people do judge by appearances, the best method of placating the busybodies and managing to stave

"Ethan Frome" by Edith Wharton. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1911.



CHAPTER VI

The correlation between money and credit is a fact which the  
monetarists have been slow to recognize. Since money in the  
modern period and even later years occupied no economic position  
which they were often very far from it in primitive times and  
also. It has been in the case of the credit money which, when  
it is used, has produced the intensity of the business cycle.

was. A similar and more noticeable instance is that of the  
silver in "Western Europe". "Money was a good thing, the poor  
relation of money to the individual was, who had taken credit into  
his hands as a thing, when about to be dismissed from the  
world. Money found itself connected with the situation,  
no less desperate because it was common in those days, of those  
to turn for home and a secure living.

It was, however, not a simple case of economic pressure, that  
presented these cases. Involuntarily involved in the necessity  
of surviving themselves. Involuntarily forced them in on all  
sides; and for this reason, if for no other, the individual  
instincts on "responsibility" can be understood as a thing and  
not of survival. Since people do judge by appearance, the  
best method of passing the hypothesis and making to serve



off social ostracism, was at all costs to keep up the conventional front.

Gertrude Atherton's husband, who provided himself with a new suit of clothes each month, never gave his wife any spending money. Her house, food and such clothes as she could make over were provided for her; what could she possibly want with money? She recalls borrowing her carfare from the maid in order to get to town to answer a summons from the editor who published her first story. Fortified with a check for one hundred and fifty dollars after that interview, she went right out and spent it all in one day's shopping. On her return home George rebuked her for being such an unexemplary wife: she should, it seems, have brought the money home and given it to him to pay off some of his debts. Women, supposedly, had no use for money.

Most difficult of all, needless to say, was the position of the unmarried woman. Situations far more complex than those of the simple country girls, Mattie and Charity, are not far to seek. Supposing the young woman had been born into a circle which placed her above the categories of governess or domestic servant, where could she look for a decent means of livelihood? Mrs. Wharton presents an unforgettable portrait in the case of Lily Bart\*, charming, gifted and beautiful to look at, upon whom an expensive education had been lavished for the clear purpose of marrying her off to a man of wealth. But Lily was still impecunious; and since in Mrs. Wharton's pages we are at last involved in the subtleties of individuality, Lily was \**"The House of Mirth"* by Edith Wharton. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York 1905.







also in her own right a person of discrimination.

Lily has a pleasant acquaintance with a young man, Lawrence Selden, cultivated and sensitive, of her own social circle, but, like her, poor. They have a sympathetic understanding which allows them to laugh about the impossibility of being serious about each other, while he points out the urgent necessity of her marrying without more delay,-- Lily is now on the verge of thirty.

"Isn't marriage your vocation? Isn't it what you're all brought up for?"

She sighed. "I suppose so. What else is there?"

"Exactly. And so why not take the plunge and have it over?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "You speak as if I ought to marry the first man who came along."

"I didn't mean to imply that you are as hard put to it as that. But, there must be someone with the requisite qualifications."

She shook her head wearily. (pp. 13-14)

The above conversation took place in Selden's apartment where Lily had been so incautious as to drop in for a cup of tea while she waited for a train to take her out of the city for the weekend. The scrubwoman on the stairs eyed Lily's departure suspiciously. Sim Rosedale, the obnoxious financier on the make, met her coming from the door,-- and the net of compromising circumstance begins to close around this sincere if uncalculating young woman. She will struggle to adjust herself to the demands of her world, a world of ease and social enjoyment where she was designed by nature and by training to shine as one of its rarest ornaments. But the fact that she must constantly truckle to those in power, those who have the money,







snares her in a web of intrigue woven by people less scrupulous than herself, and she is slowly, cruelly strangled. Such is the power of circumstantial evidence that even Selden, the one person who values Lily for her individual qualities, doubts her ultimate integrity, suspects from all the talk that encircles Lily's name, there must exist "the proverbial relation between smoke and fire". Lily is aware of the intolerable situation and summarizes the conventional exigencies of her day:

"The whole truth?" Miss Bart laughed. "What is the truth? Where a woman is concerned, it's the story that's easiest to believe. In this case it's a great deal easier to believe Bertha Dorset's story than mine, because she had a big house and an opera box, and it's convenient to be on good terms with her . . . The truth about any girl is that once she's talked about she's done for; and the more she explains her case the worse it looks." (pp. 363-4)

Lily is used unscrupulously by her wealthy friends to serve as errand-girl in any kind of unpleasant or unsavory social emergency. Bertha Dorset takes Lily abroad on the Dorset yacht to amuse George while Bertha carries on affairs with a number of young favorites; and when finally Bertha's shinnanagins are becoming too obvious to cover up, she turns her fire on Lily to draw a red herring across the trail. Lily is finished, for her aunt who might have left her a tidy little fortune, and indeed intended to do so, cuts her off with a sum barely sufficient to meet her accumulated obligations. This is the way the aunt reasons, having listened to vague rumors over a long period;

There remained in her thoughts a settled deposit of resentment against her niece, all the denser because it was not to be







cleared by explanation or discussion. It was horrible of a young girl to let herself be talked about; however unfounded the charges against her, she must be to blame for their being made. (p. 205)

So when the story from Europe reaches New York that Lily was seen on the Paris train at eleven p.m.-- this is the incriminating hour time and again-- with George Dorset, Bertha having taken off for an all night sojourn with her young poet, leaving Lily stranded with George-- but this doesn't matter-- Lily's aunt repudiates her niece and withdraws the means whereby Lily would have had the freedom to be her decent, cultivated, socially ornamental and valuable self. The story of Lily Bart -- of whom, incidentally, Mrs. Wharton always speaks as "Miss Bart", subtly conveying a sense of respect due her importance-- is one of the best documented and most poignant of American literary records of women's struggle to be recognized as individual human beings with all the rights and privileges thereof.

How well Lily sees through the people she must dicker with for her meagre share of their crumbs!

How dreary and trivial these people were . . . merely dull in a loud way. Under the glitter of their opportunities she saw the poverty of their achievement. (pp. 87-8)

And yet since her career, her vocation for which she had been trained with pitiful exclusiveness, was here among them, she strives valiantly to make the best of a bad bargain. Weekend-ing after her tea-hour with Selden, she finds ready at hand a wealthy, stupid, selfish young bachelor toward whom she real-







izes shrewdly she should direct her fire, in which stratagem she is helped by her hostess.

She had been bored all the afternoon by Percy Gryce-- the mere thought seemed to awaken an echo of his droning voice-- but she could not afford to ignore him on the morrow, she must follow up her success, must submit to more boredom, must be ready with fresh compliances and adaptabilities, and all on the bare chance that he might ultimately decide to do her the honour of boring her for life.

It was a hateful fate-- but how escape from it? What choice had she? (p. 39)

Unfortunately Miss Bart, being capable of the higher enjoyment of giving and receiving a really sympathetic understanding enriched with cultural interests, jettisons her chances with this eligible young man. She gives him the slip at the crucial moment and goes off for a long afternoon with Selden. No wonder Lily's most patient friends, who are anxious to help her to a good match, begin to find her hopeless. Lily and Selden come very near to a thorough understanding at this moment, and yet just miss out because both have an uneasy suspicion that she is incapable of living the life of modest circumstances. She admits she needs money, a great deal of money, to lead the life she-- and others-- believe she is designed for. Selden does not have that money, and so for a long period they part. Some time later we see Lily through Selden's eyes, a picture of what could be made of the belle of that period when to physical beauty the refinement of intellectual and aesthetic and social taste were added:

Meanwhile as the dinner advanced through a labyrinth of courses . . . Selden's general watchfulness began to lose







itself in a particular study of Miss Bart. It was one of the days she was so handsome that to be handsome was enough, and all the rest-- her grace, her quickness, her social felicities -- seemed the overflow of a bounteous nature. But what especially struck him was the way in which she detached herself, by a hundred indefinable shades, from the very persons who most abounded in her own style. It was in just such company, the fine flower and complete expression of the state she aspired to, that the differences came out with special poignancy, her grace cheapening the other women's smartness as her finely discriminated silences made their chatter dull. The strain of the last hours had restored to her face the deeper eloquence which Selden had lately missed in it . . . Yes, she was matchless-- it was the one word for her . . . (p. 346)

It is particularly puzzling to Selden at this moment, that Miss Bart, in whom he discerns such rare personal gifts, should be content with living as a parasite among people who are her inferiors in everything except purse. Mrs. Wharton herself knew this world too well, and woman of mentality and taste that she was, broke from it, threw the gauntlet at the petty conventions of the day, choosing for her material as an author the showy superficiality of an order whose prestige rested wholly upon wealth. Into Selden's mind she infuses distaste for "the stupid costliness of the food and the showy dulness of the talk .

. . . "

The strident setting of the restaurant, in which their table seemed set apart in a special glare of publicity, and the presence at it of little Dabham of the "Riviera Notes" emphasized the ideals of a world where conspicuousness passed for distinction, and the society column had become the roll of fame.  
(p. 347)

On Lily's part, she had recognized in Selden a quality which set him quite apart from dependence on material things. Materialistic as she had been trained to be, yet the core of her be-







ing is struggling against her environment, still compromising, still unsatisfied. Most of all she admires Selden "for being able to convey as distinct a sense of superiority as the richest man she had ever met." (p.104) They confront each other over an apparently insuperable barrier, and yet essentially they are the two designed to combine forces against the tawdry appeasements of vulgar, shallow, luxurious, purposeless living, a scheme which Mrs. Wharton does not hesitate to show in many instances as ugly in its vindictive egoism.

Lily's miserable efforts to keep her head financially above water culminate in her acceptance of what she at first believes is an honorable deal with the husband of a friend-- he offering to invest her little capital for her. So she receives a total of nine thousand dollars from Gus Trenor, only to find in the end she is expected to pay with the ultimate in personal attention. Once again the trap closes around this pathetic creature -- the woman who has little or no money and no means of earning her own. Lily does attempt it, finally seizes the bull by the horns and sets out to earn a living; but it is too late in her youth and she is sadly unsuited to the struggle. Sweatshop conditions in the millinery establishment where she finds employment wear her down, and the end of this lovely person, earnest and honest and finely wrought, is an overdose of chloral to quiet her tired nerves into a night's rest. -- Selden, of course, at last having seen the light that they two are capable of making a life for themselves such as they have not been able to find among their acquaintances, arrives the morning Lily is



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found dead. He takes strange comfort, which is offered as the final palliation of stark tragedy:

He saw that all the conditions of their life had conspired to keep them apart; since her very detachment from the external influences which swayed her had increased his spiritual fastidiousness, and made it more difficult for him to live and love uncritically. But at least he had loved her-- had been willing to stake his future on his faith in her-- and if the moment had been fated to pass from them before they could seize it, he saw now that, for both, it had been saved whole out of the ruin of their lives.

It was this moment of love, this fleeting victory over themselves, which had kept them from atrophy and extinction . . .  
(p. 532)

"From atrophy and extinction".-- Some means whereby the woman could honestly follow a course toward individual and social realization without being the object of murderous scandal, this so simple thing would have saved her from atrophy and extinction. How slow this world has been to recognize the most meagre title to existence among the oppressed! Mrs. Wharton's fine-pointed pen dissects the abominable issue with devastating effect. Lily Bart remains one of the most interesting, attractive and heart-rending of the tragic heroines in American literature.

The tragedy is that anything so beautiful as Lily must be sacrificed to sordid circumstance. The Victorians worshipped beauty, while we in our rage against them and their world have reduced it practically to a non-essential. The fact that we are cheating ourselves will probably dawn upon us before too long. But the taste needs a long cultivation. It was in its flower during the days of the tableaux vivants, favorite Victorian entertainment that they were. We do not remember Lily dying in her squalid little room of the over-dose of chloral; we







remember her rather at the peak of her loveliness. And so for one last glimpse I present you the picture of Miss Bart on a brilliant evening, where she shone most brilliantly in tableau. First the setting, in which Selden recognizes the necessary part money plays:

All he asked was that the very rich should live up to their calling as stage-managers, and not spend their money in a dull way. This the Brys could certainly not be charged with doing. Their recently built house, whatever it might lack as a frame for domesticity, was almost as well designed for the display of a festal assemblage as one of those airy pleasure-halls which the Italian architects improvised to set off the hospitality of princes . . . The seated throng, filling the immense room without undue crowding, presented a surface of rich tissues and jewelled shoulders in harmony with the festooned and gilded walls, and the flushed splendours of the Venetian ceiling. At the farther end of the room a stage had been constructed behind a proscenium arch curtained with folds of old damask. (p. 212)

Such were the lavish arrangements awaiting the pièce de resistance, the culmination of delight which these people who loved visual beauty devised for themselves in harmony of line and color, the posing of living people in simulation of portraits by the great masters. It was a peculiar gift of the imagination to see these tableaux under the most favorable light. Unless perfectly done they might easily turn into farce, and even at their best they must be helped along by the inner vision of the spectator. Mrs. Wharton offers some valuable suggestions on how one could derive most enjoyment from the point of view of the audience:

Tableaux vivants depend for their effect not only on the happy disposal of lights and the interposition of layers of gauze, but on a corresponding adjustment of the mental vision. To unfurn-



...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

All in all, it was a very fine thing to see  
...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.

...the first of the great of the world.



ished minds they remain in spite of every enhancement of art, a superior kind of wax-works; but to the responsive fancy they may give magic glimpses of the boundary world between fact and imagination. Selden's mind was of this order: he could yield to vision-making influences as completely as a child to the spell of a fairy-tale . . . . The pictures succeeded each other with the rhythmic march of some splendid frieze, in which the fugitive curves of living flesh and the wandering light of young eyes have been subdued to plastic harmony without losing the charm of life. (p. 213)

Thoroughly satisfactory as the other posers had proven themselves to be, Miss Bart once again stands out, in Selden's term, as "matchless". In the following passage we have a perfect example of what this Victorian worship of beauty could compass. Of its type it is compelling. How little we know of it today with our avidity for action at high speed!

The unanimous "Oh!" of the spectators was a tribute, not to the brush-work of Reynolds's "Mrs. Lloyd" but to the flesh and blood loveliness of Lily Bart. She had shown her artistic intelligence in selecting a type so like her own that she could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself. It was as though she had stepped, not out of, but into, Reynolds's canvas, banishing the phantom of his dead beauty by the beams of her living grace . . . . Her pale draperies, and the background of foliage against which she stood, served only to relieve the long dryad-like curves that swept upward from her poised foot to her lifted arm. The noble buoyancy of her attitude, its suggestion of soaring grace, revealed the touch of poetry in her beauty that Selden always felt in her presence . . . . Its expression was now so vivid that for the first time he seemed to see before him the real Lily Bart, divested of the trivialities of her little world, and catching for a moment a note of the eternal harmony of which her beauty was a part . . . . (p. 218)

For all that some of those ill-smelling mentalities amid which Lily's lot was cast muttered imprecations about it being "damned bad taste" for her to show off her figure so, the picture remains with us as an expression of a curiously arresting







character, a deeply touching story, and of the warm, rich type of beauty which the world just sunk beyond the horizon so passionately served.



character, a deeply religious man, and of the same, with the  
at heart which the world has seen the history of  
personally known.



## CHAPTER VII

The familiar "living a lie" charge against the Victorian insistence on respectability in appearance if nothing else, is less than fair. I have tried to make it clear that hypocrisy pure and simple is no sufficient explanation of the motive behind the elaborate nineteenth century facade. Our grandmothers were determined, it is true, to have life beautiful, and waived any disturbing evidence to the contrary; if they were not always impervious to the "lure of evil", in these cases they saw evil as offering vital experience beyond the straight and narrow path set down before them, and the deviations were depicted as highly colorful, anything but sordid. Clearly such imaginative moral holidays as they took were more romantic than convincing. By and large, since obeying the rules was necessary to prevent social ostracism, our grandmothers found it not only the moral but the sane practical course to bow to that same powerful public opinion which all except the daring few must serve. It was the man's privilege to get away with murder while in women's hands was placed the safeguarding of the morals that mattered. "Oh, the family is all right, my dear. I never

heard a breath against the women,"\* is a cogent summary of \**"The Deliverance"* by Ellen Glasgow. Doubleday, Page & Co., New York 1904. p. 270.



## CHAPTER VII

The familiar "living a lie" charge against the Victorian idealists on respectability in appearance is nothing else. It is a charge which I have tried to make it clear that hypocrisy and double life are not the only explanations of the double life. The elaborate nineteenth century facade, the grandiose and ostentatious, is in truth, to have life beautiful, and to have any discreditable evidence to the contrary; if they were not all were important to the "face of evil", in these cases they are all as offering with experience beyond the insight and how the path was down before them, and the deviations were not as highly colored, anything but credible. Clearly again, the five moral holidays as they took were more romantic than conventional. By and large, since obeying the rules was necessary to prevent social ostracism, our grandfathers found it not only the moral but the same practical course to bow to that same powerful public opinion which all except the daring few must serve. If we are man's privilege to get away with murder while in woman's hands was placed the safeguard of the morals that mattered. "Oh, the family is all right, my dear. I never heard a word against the family." In a copy of Murray's "The Delinquents" by Helen Chamberlain, Boston, Page & Co., New York 1906. p. 200.



the situation.

As part and parcel of the Victorian moral and aesthetic scheme, these immediate forebears of ours had achieved a certain delight in play-acting, and it was not until this zest broke down that the folly of the procedure began to be apparent to those who came after. We can understand what went on in those strange days just behind us only if we admit the possibility of delight in histrionics, as well as the pleasant and fortifying qualities inherent in the possession of sentimental illusion. The avowed satisfaction of doing the right thing, which was the chief Victorian aspiration and mainstay, is a point which should be conceded in any day without undue laboring,-- while the play-acting could be made to serve this principle in the form of a public declaration of faith. Hence, even while our grandmothers could enjoy their dramatics, they could see themselves most picturesquely realizing their special synthesis of beauty and goodness. To be dramatic is not essentially to be false, although the gap between what is real and what is simulated may in time widen to the point where the charge of hypocrisy may be made with justice.

So indeed time has proven: the Victorian system of continually playing for approval held the seeds of revolt and ultimately of iconoclasm within its very nature. And yet the battering down of the principle of save the surface and you save all, which is what the Victorians found themselves practising in the end, might never have been so thoroughly effected had there not been local American conditions to add strength to the issue.







At the moment the walls were beginning to totter throughout that sphere subject to the term Victorian-- the English-speaking World-- there were special circumstances in the Southern States of the Union, smarting from defeat and impoverishment, and determined to admit only the vanished glory, which made the incompatibility between things as they were and things as they were reported, especially glaring. Ellen Glasgow as a post-Victorian and particularly as a Virginian becomes at this period one of the great trail-blazers of courageous candor among the women writers in the United States.

Like all authors who succeed in summarizing an epoch, she is near enough to have experienced the dissolving values, yet never so wholly committed to them that she was rendered incapable of perspective. In other words she embraced the transitional period and emerged clarified and endowed with peculiar wealth of experience into a later and a vastly different world. Without such shock of contrast, it would clearly be difficult to see and to set down the striking characteristics of any day. The Victorians could no more estimate themselves than we can estimate ourselves without benefit of comparative values,-- a truism of critical appraisal which seems to have escaped Mr. Bernard DeVoto in his lament that the authors in the United States of the 1920's "turned their backs on America" of their day. Mr. DeVoto's remarks would seem to indicate that he asks fiction to record the ephemeral moment, which is not exactly

\*"They Turned Their Backs on America" by Bernard DeVoto. Article in the Saturday Review of Literature, April 8, 1944.



At the moment the walls were beginning to rot in the corners and  
apartments to the town of the English-speaking  
world--there were several circumstances in the Southern States  
of the Union, resulting from defeat and impoverishment, and de-  
scribed to admit only the vanished glory, which made the town  
possibility between things as they were and things as they were  
reported, especially during. When Glasgow on a post-Victorian  
and particularly as a Victorian because of this period of  
the great anti-class of courage and honor among the women  
writers in the United States.

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Richard Dyer in his latest book the authors in the United  
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"The Founding of the American Nation" by Richard Dyer, 1944.  
This is the history of the American people, April 2, 1944.



the same function exacted by Miss Glasgow who insists upon illumination. She expresses the case for the long view in a few concise words:

To be too near, it appears, is more fatal in literature than to be too far away; for it is better that the creative writer should resort to imagination than that he should be overwhelmed by emotion.\*

Young and alone in her field, Miss Glasgow undertook to break down "the formal, the false, the affected, the sentimental, and the pretentious". She chooses to localize these qualities as peculiar to Southern writing, but the charge might be made equally by any coming modern in the twilight of the Victorian age. She does herself a little less than justice in insisting upon the exclusive Southern character of her work, belonging rather, as she does, to the wide crisis of the new versus the Victorian in American life. So we shall take Ellen Glasgow as a leader of the women writers in the United States who specifically tackle the problem of bridging the gap between appearances and actuality.

The greater value of Miss Glasgow's later work over her earlier is not simply a case of maturity over the neophyte. Removed at greater distance she can see her object better; and in the interim the battle she has been waging for the right to call things by their names has gained her the freedom she sought from what she calls "the optimistic moonshine" prevalent at the

\*"A Certain Measure" by Ellen Glasgow. Harcourt Brace, New York, 1943. p. 150.







time she began writing. Her technique and her vision have been sharpened, but she knew what she was after from the moment she started. As early as 1904 she gives Maria Fletcher in "The Deliverance"\* these challenging words:

"Anything is better than a long wearing falsehood, or than those hideous little shams that we were always afraid to touch for fear they would melt and show us our own nakedness . . . I am myself now for the first time since I was born, and at last I shall let my own nature teach me how to live." (p. 362)

Old Mrs. Blake, in the same story, has suffered from physical and deliberate mental blindness since the defeat of the South in the Civil War. Her children, for the old lady's sake, keep up a wearing masquerade to the effect that they are still in the old family mansion surrounded with the servants and the luxury which had been theirs before the disaster. Mrs. Blake serves as the type who prefers keeping up appearances at all costs, who insists upon it to the point of self-delusion, while Maria strikes the new note of revolt against intolerable sham. The title of the book, "The Deliverance", must be understood in the clear sense of deliverance from oppressive and finally suicidal illusion.

Outspoken as Maria's revolt is seen to be, still if Miss Glasgow had been able to go no farther and see no more clearly, we should have been left with the problem of distilling much of the circumstances of the day for ourselves from this book. Consider for instance the problem of the monstrously ill-

\*"The Deliverance" by Ellen Glasgow. Doubleday, Page & Company New York 1904.







treated woman who nonetheless must preserve the appearance of meek forbearance. Maria, in defence of her rake of a brother, has had an argument with her brutal grandfather, and the old man proceeds to lock Maria out of the house for the night. She starts off in the dark to seek shelter with a relative, only to get lost and ramble in the woods until rescued by her family's arch-enemy, Christopher Blake. So escorted she returns to her grandfather's barn to pass the night. The next morning, does she venture to state the case clearly to the old man, does she give him even a few words of remonstrance, or better still, does she walk out, as she surely had reason enough to do? Oh, no, not this Southern woman, however rebellious she may be in other pages. This is the picture of the breakfast table,-- and you notice it is presented directly, without that irony which becomes the delicious characteristic of Miss Glasgow once her pen point is sharpened to her task:

He looked sullen and dirty, as if he had slept all night in his clothes, and he responded to Maria's few good-humoured remarks with a single abrupt nod over his coffee-cup. As she watched him a feeling of pity for his loneliness moved her heart, and when he rose hastily at last and strode out into the hall she followed him and spoke gently while he paused to take down his hat . . .

"If I could only be of some use to you, grandfather . . ."  
(pp. 385-6)

Exemplary, if you like, but possibly ineffective in the last analysis, as compared with a candid threshing out of the issues of brutality and gross injustice. We must read between the lines here, as we shall not have to do once Miss Glasgow has clearly sifted the issues of reality versus appearance in her







later books.

Five years later, with sharper realism of vision, Miss Glasgow touches off the implications of relationship which the existence of total feminine meekness entails. Sarah Mickleborough, well born and finely nurtured, gets herself married, as many of these women seem to have done, or have done for them, to a monstrous brute of a man from whom she and her child are forced to flee-- with the flashes and bangs of melodrama attendant. The temptation in such cases is to lash out in a furious indictment of the bestiality of the male nature-- and there were those ready to visit such indictments. But such infallible grasp of the interdependence of relationships as Miss Glasgow has will not allow a unilateral settlement of the case. No doubt the meek all-enduring woman had been made what she was by a pernicious system of education, and yet being what she was, she must bear her share of responsibility for the consequences. Here is a neat summation of the way in which such women invited trouble upon their own heads. One of the town gossips is evaluating Sarah Mickleborough's case:\*

"Ah, I could see that she was the sort that's obliged to be beaten sooner or later if thar was anybody handy around to do it. Some women are made so that they're never happy except when they're hurt, an' she's one of 'em. Why, they can't so much as look at a man without invitin' him to ill-treat 'em."

The situation is beginning to be seen in <sup>n</sup>perspective, you notice; the long-suffering Maria, so shortly before presented

\* "The Romance of a Plain Man" by Ellen Glasgow. Macmillan Company. New York 1909. p. 22.







simply as an approved fact of the heroine's role, is here broken down into its component, maleficent parts. Miss Glasgow will have a great deal more later to say about women's attempt at "cornering virtue", but this brief view will have to suffice in a swift sketch such as ours of the moment.

Once arrived at the peak of her powers Miss Glasgow gives the Victorian complexities a thorough airing in two novels of major importance, "The Romantic Comedians"<sup>1</sup> published in 1926, and "The Sheltered Life"<sup>2</sup> appearing in 1932. Armed with "the way of the swift stroke, of the clean cut, of the deep penetration into experience" which she sets up as her objective,<sup>3</sup> this most effective satirist sweeps away the airy niceties of fiction from the carefully contrived Victorian double standard of morality, terming it "that branch of conduct which was familiar to ancient moralists as nature in man and depravity in women."<sup>4</sup> George Birdsong's extra-marital affairs, excused from the Victorian point of view as "having nothing to do with his marriage" 5) are no longer so casually dismissed when exposed to "the embarrassing logic of the feminine mind". Outstanding among Miss Glasgow's many portraits of Victorian women bravely attempting to preserve a gloss of right appearance over a rotten substance is Eva Birdsong in "The Sheltered Life".

Eva Howard, as she was in her youth, presents an arresting

- 1) Doubleday, Page & Co., New York 1926. 4) *ibid.* p. 7.  
 2) Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., New York 1932. 5) *ibid.* p. 132.  
 3) "A Certain Measure" by Ellen Glasgow. Harcourt Brace & Co., New York 1943. p. 17.



slightly as an account of the history of the book, in the program  
down into the chapters, without any other. This chapter will  
have a great deal more to say about the history of the  
"concerning history", but this part will have to do with the  
a little later than the end of the program.

One arrived at the end of the program with the history of the  
Victorian age, which is the history of the Victorian age, in the  
important, "The Victorian Age", published in 1900, and  
"The Victorian Age", appearing in 1900. As with the  
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Two important, which are the end of the Victorian age, in the  
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George Bernard Shaw's extra-ordinary history, which is the history of the  
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picture of the power of the belle over the imagination of our grandmother's world. A famous beauty in the 1890's, entire communities were disrupted from their daily routine when this woman made an appearance in public. Such phenomena repeat themselves today with the arrival of the professional beauties, the movie stars, but Eva, at best no more than a local light, was worshipped simply for her personal loveliness, was pursued for the sheer visual joy of glimpsing her pass. So far as I know we have no such refinement of aesthetic taste today. Witness its effects in action:

Rumours sped from door to door as she walked down the street; crowds gathered at corners or flocked breathless to the windows of clubs . . . Not only had her beauty delayed wedding processions, but once, it was said, she had even retarded a funeral when she happened to enter Rose Hill Cemetery just as the pall-bearers were lowering the coffin into a grave . . . Tall, slender, royal in her carriage, hers was that perfect loveliness which made the hearts of old men flutter and miss a beat when she approached them. Everything about her was flowing, and everything flowed divinely. Her figure curved and melted and curved again in the queenly style of the period; her bronze hair rippled over a head so faultless that its proper setting was allegory; her eyes were so radiant in colour that they had been compared by a Victorian poet to bluebirds flying . . . When she appeared every party turned into a pageant. She could make a banquet of the simplest supper merely by sitting down at the table. (p. 19)

Designed to shed radiance about her, as this enchanting person most certainly was, Eva Birdsong persists in carrying through her role despite the hideous mess her marriage turns out to be. George is "generous", so she and his friends maintain, and therefore he simply cannot resist feminine appeal no matter from what quarters it appears. He is invariably unfaithful, and yet the conviction that he really loves her,







Eva, above all, sustains her in what she insists is happiness. Even if he should kill her, she tells him, she knows that he would love her still. And since George knows that he has married "an angel", how could he, poor fallible man, hope to measure up in any other way than an humble and wayward worshipfulness? Angels, indeed, must have been very, very hard to live with, and George, despicable creature that he is, deserves some exoneration according to the difficult Victorian circumstances in which he lived.

Summarizing the chief benefits of emancipation from that Victorian scheme, Miss Glasgow in her collection of prefaces\*, sets first "the hardly won victory not to be glad". But Eva Birdsong must sustain the appearance of gladness, she must smile and smile and keep on smiling. It was her one hold on George never to admit that she knew what he was doing; it was her one power over the wreck of her life that she would not admit the wreckage. Observe now the terrible quietness of this scene, when, having been able to overlook so many vagaries, Eva comes upon George embracing the very young daughter of established family connections;

Suddenly, while her (the girl's) whole being vibrated, a shudder jerked through his muscles, and she was left there, alone and abandoned, as his arms dropped from her body. From the horror in his face, she knew, before she spun around, that Mrs. Birdsong was looking at them out of the dusk in the library. Frozen, expressionless, grey as a shadow, she smiled through them and beyond them to the empty horizon. For an instant time paused. Then she said in a voice that was as vac-

\*"Certain Measure" by Ellen Glasgow. Harcourt Brace 1943. p.118.







ant as her smile, "George, I want you," and turned slowly back into the room. (pp. 390-1)

The finale comes quickly now: George goes into the house, a shot is heard-- was it by his hand or Eva's? At least when the girl, Jenny Blair, comes in, George is lying dead, while Eva, sitting "very erect, gazed with her fixed smile, into the twilight beyond the window." (p. 393)

Eva Birdsong goes down in our social history as a martyr to the cause of a vanished ideal. Her struggle against facts is admitted to be noble and heroic; there was no blindness possible to her, timidity was a luxury withheld. Her only fault was the vain hope that she could salvage something of beauty and honorable living by stanchly rejecting the ugly and the vicious as ultimate evidence. Perhaps she was not wrong in principle. Plenty of times today I believe we dismiss a misstep of one kind or another with the brief formula of "skip it". And in the end the dismissal is proven a shrewd evaluation of a mere incidental lapse. But Eva's problem was too much for her method; the evidence against her brave denials was overwhelming. Yet she is unschooled in any other method, and the very thoroughness of her training left her a helpless victim to transparent but inflexible pretence. That way madness lies, and Eva went stark mad.

Since Eva's vision was clear enough as far as the facts of the case are concerned-- it is only in coming to grips with the facts that she fails-- she provides a competent vehicle for some interesting comments on the difficult role of the belle as







seen from the inside. Mrs. Stowe's direct statements on the convention that made pets of women, while society watched them exhibit themselves and do their little tricks, then, cruel and indifferent, passed on, has the dramatic embodiment needed in Eva's admission of the strain involved in carrying off the part expected of her. Jenny Blair, that troublesome propinquity who precipitates the tragedy, is worshipping at Eva's shrine with comments on how wonderful it must be to be loved without taking the least bit of trouble. To which Eva answers:

"Oh, you do take trouble if you have a reputation to keep up, and no fame on earth is so exacting as a reputation for beauty. Even if you give up everything else for the sake of love, as I did, you are still a slave to fear. Fear of losing love. Fear of losing the power that won love so easily. I sometimes think there is nothing so terrible for a woman," she said passionately, while her hands clutched at the blown curtains, "as to be loved for her beauty." (p. 283-4)

Thus the tyranny of keeping up appearances exerted its harsh power over even those who were endowed by nature most obviously to benefit from appearance. Women began to see that the capacity to rule by such transient sway as physical charm alone was no better than a mixed blessing at best. We have seen how Eva created her sensation in the 1890's simply by lending her presence. To evaluate how purely aesthetic was that appeal of hers, we may turn by way of contrast to Miss Glasgow's interpretation of the power of the modern woman. Judge Honeywell,\* old and ill, thoroughly exhausted by his attempts to recover his youth

\*"The Romantic Comedians" by Ellen Glasgow. Doubleday, Page & Company. New York 1926.







through marriage with a young woman who deserts him, lies in bed reviewing the images of all the women who have affected his life. He is curiously emotionless until his contemplation turns to the nurse who attends him. Now we see how functional, as apart from purely decorative, the new ideal has become:

Fresh, spotless, and womanly, in her white uniform, with the competent hands of a physician and the wise and tender touch of a mother. Those beneficent hands and that infallible touch . . . After all, was there any grace, any beauty, any virtue, that could compare with tenderness in a woman? Gentle and young! Young from her small round head, where her short brown hair curled like the petals of a sunflower beneath the starched band of her cap, to her slender ankles, in white stockings, under the neat hem of her skirt. Swifter than light, swifter than inspiration, while he followed her with his eyes, the thought darted into his mind: "There is the woman I ought to have married!" There, sympathetic and young, obeying her feminine instinct in every exquisite gesture, was the woman he ought to have married. (pp. 344-5)

Judge Honeywell has been in love with the reigning favorite of each era through three generations: Amanda Lightfoot, the personification of Victorian grace and Victorian sense of propriety, Annabel, the egotistical little flapper, shallow, vivacious, startling in her directness, and now at last this vital embodiment of feminine service. His experiences have covered a long period, and each type is presented with admirable objectivity, each in its way serves to set off the merits and deficiencies of the others. However much today we may acclaim this charming and so comforting little nurse depicted above, the possibility remains she might not hold the attention of a wide-ranging intellect for long. It is quite possible she would be lacking in depth, "subtlety and" that desirable quality over a







long relationship, the element of surprise.

In conclusion, the special attraction of the Victorian type is that it was highly complex, sensitive, earnest and finely disciplined. Rigorously committed to a noble if perishable pattern, it is still capable of arousing tragic emotion in its failures. Whereas, so far as I have been able to glean from current literature, our greater simplicity, our more tentative and limited reach-- if we admit the desirability of the unattainable at all-- touches no heights beyond pathos. Eva Birdsong stands out in sharp relief as an arresting figure among the types of American women preserved in fiction, who have sought, however vainly, for the best.



long relationship, the element of surprise.  
In connection, the special attention of the Western  
is that it is highly complex, sensitive, and that  
dissemination. Historically connected to a solid it  
person, in a solid circle of several people in the  
relation. However, as far as I have been able to learn from  
current literature, our present situation, our more sensitive  
and limited means-- it is also the possibility of our re-  
establishing at all-- somewhat no longer beyond reason. For  
Episcopalians are in many ways as an expanding force  
among the types of American women presented in this, the  
new world, however valid, for the past.



## CHAPTER VIII

However many the angles from which this search of the American woman for herself may be viewed, they all come down finally to the demand for enfranchisement as an individual. Supposedly, under the old system a woman could better realize her nature and her duty to the race if her interests and activities were sharply restricted to the biological function, with certain social and spiritual embroideries on the theme of her high mission permitted by way of keeping her quiet within her narrow sphere. The very idea of a woman having a mind and a personality of her own was frightening, not to say anarchical, involving all kinds of social displacements, possibly even total disaster. One can see easily how the unknown quantity of the woman's mind could strike such terror to a society which had not allowed that mind to try its wings, so could not foresee where it might take off to, nor at what cost. If things were evidently not perfect, it seemed a clear case of better bear "those ills we have, than fly to others that we know not of".

Once again the local conditions of the American world touch off the spark that sends the Victorian stability up in smoke. While this was a new country, the East was still committed in ideology to the traditional European culture. It was from the farthest western frontiers of the land, in California, that the



CHAPTER VII

However, even the critics from which this account of the American  
woman is derived may be shown, they all come down finally to  
the demand for enlightenment as an individual. (Suggested)  
under the old system a woman could better realize her nature  
and her duty to the race if her knowledge and activities were  
directly related to the biological function, with certain  
social and spiritual considerations on the plane of her life.  
What is involved by way of keeping her duties within her sphere  
sphere. The very idea of a woman having a mind and a personality-  
type of her own and independent, not to say universal, involves  
the full right of social disengagement, possibly even total dis-  
engagement. But this is exactly how the unknown quantity of the woman's  
mind could realize such power to a society which was not allowed  
that mind to put its wings, so could not know where it might  
take off to, nor at what point. If things were evidently not  
perfect, it would be a clear case of better than "there it is"  
have, then fly to where you want to go.

Once again the local conditions of the American world come  
off the point that made the Victorian steadily up in arms.  
While it was a new country, the state was still dominated by  
loyalty to the traditional European culture. It was from the  
farther western frontiers of the land, in California, that the



most rebellious and individualistic of feminine voices demanding freedom for her sex first smites the ear of a trembling world. Romantic as Gertrude Atherton was in her first publication, "What Dreams May Come" in 1888, by 1890 she begins to find her true field in a story of the ranch life of California. A sharp, fresh wind of spontaneity blows across the pages of American women's writing from this moment forth. Compare, for instance, the introduction of this savage little heroine with the conventional grandeur of Sioned seen in the opening paragraphs of "What Dreams May Come". Carmelita enters on a gust of righteous wrath against the persecution inflicted by her schoolmates:

With a cry of pent up rage and shame, Carmelita sprang upon her assailant, and flinging him to the ground, dealt him a blow that drew forth the howl of a lassoed coyote. The others, enraged anew at their comrade's discomfiture, set up a shrill and simultaneous yell and with one accord cast themselves upon Carmelita. Kicking, hitting, and biting, she managed to struggle through the vociferating crowd just as the teacher reappeared . . . (pp 10-11)\*

Endowed with an abundance of personality in her own right, Gertrude Atherton in the beginning of her work, at least, confers upon many of her characters a share of her own entertaining originality. This little Carmelita speaks for her creator, when, forbidden to do a certain thing without permission, she still does it, since in her Mexican lingo she admits she "like better do the penance". The heavy lid of Victorian propriety

\*"Los Cerritos", A Romance of the Modern Time, by Gertrude Franklin Atherton. John W. Lovell Company. New York 1890.







and Victorian duteous observance of the most finicky rules is now blown into the ether of vanished causes. Gertrude Atherton is off on her meteoric career in search of what the American woman can find for herself once she resolves to follow whatever adventurous course her special nature dictates.

"Los Cerritos" in addition to presenting this fiery young individualist, Carmelita, undertakes a study of the squatters' conditions on the large Californian ranches. Singleness of purpose here is rather mixed up among a number of social theories: the right of the human being to life, demanding equalization of means between those who are enormously wealthy and those without a bare subsistence, and on the other side, the theory that if a man cannot make a living he is worthless and society will be well rid of him. Individualist that Gertrude Atherton is, one feels her own bias lies in the direction of the survival of the fittest. Her sympathy does not tend naturally toward the weaklings of the race, and such explorations as she makes into the problem are confined to her earliest works. Forthwith she becomes the avowed apostle of a single purpose, that of unshackling her sisterhood from their Victorian trammels.

Mrs. Atherton summarizes her purpose clearly in the dedication to her most comprehensive survey of the American woman's world, "Patience Sparhawk and Her Times"\*. Directing her words to "M. Paul Bourget, who alone, of all foreigners, has detected in its full significance, the ultimate religion of

\*"Patience Sparhawk and Her Times", A Novel, by Gertrude Atherton. John Lane: The Bodley Head, N.Y. and London 1897.







that strange composite known as 'The American', is Individual Will", she goes on to remark;

Leaving the ultra-religious element out of the question, the high, the low, the rich, the poor, the man, the woman of this section of the Western World, each, consciously or unconsciously, believes in, relies on himself primarily. In the higher civilisation this amounts to intellectual anarchy, and its tendency is to make Americans, or, more exactly, United Statesians, a New Race in a sense far more portentous than in any which has yet been recognized . . . . That this extraordinary self-dependence and independence of certain traditions that govern older nations make the quintessential part of the women as of the men of this race I have endeavoured to illustrate in the following pages.

The story of Patience begins when she is fifteen years old in company with her pretty but languid little Spanish friend, Rosita, driving a wagonload of supplies home to the ranch for the men's dinner. Her father is dead and her mother is a drunken drab whose affairs with the hired men serve to shake Patience out of any romantic delusions as to the nature of sex at an early stage in her career. Yet the crisis is not glossed over, Patience must go through the romantic mood first in proper dramatic sequence. She is devouring a volume of Byron's poetry, lent her by one Mr. Foord who had seen promise of intellectual development in the little ragamuffin, with these results:

She might be unlettered in woman's wisdom, but the transcendent passion, the pounding vitality of the poet, carried straight to intuition . . . . That incomparable objectivity sang the song of songs as distinctly into her brain as had it gathered the sounds of life for twenty years . . . . She was filled with a soft tumult which she did not in the least comprehend, and happy . . . . She was in that transition state when for the first and last time passion is poetry . (p. 32)



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that change suggests known as the ...

... the ...

... the ...

The story of ...

... the ...



A little too much of this sort of thing and the text would begin to get very sticky, but it is not characteristic of the swift-moving Gertrude Atherton to give us too much. Patience in her adolescent bliss rushes up to the ruined abbey tower where her pet owl is subjected to a battle of embraces, presented with that zestful vivacity which is Mrs. Atherton's gift to the New World. Solomon, the owl,

manifested his disapproval by biting at her shoulder fiercely. She shrieked and boxed his ears smartly. He flapped his wings wildly. A battle royal was imminent in that sacred tower where once the silver bells had called the holy men to prayer . . .  
(p. 35)

One feels that romance is safe with this woman, it will not be so overdone that perforce the baby must be thrown out with the bath. Once Patience encounters a very unlovely reality in her mother's life, an awareness that leaves the child haggard, her face "pinched as the features of the dead", she seeks refuge for a time in the pursuits of "sexless intellect", having first thrown Byron out of her room at such arm's length as a pair of tongs provided.-- There is much unconscious humor in Gertrude Atherton, for which the reader can only thank her further!

Patience is next introduced to a world of good causes in the East, her mother having been burned to death in a ranch fire, and the child committed to the kind offices of two worthy spinsters campaigning for temperance in New York. On the train she becomes acquainted with a newspaper editor who assures her "there is one thing more fascinating than beauty, and that is a strong individuality. It radiates and magnetises." Her







mind goes on growing, experiencing in the conversation of this man the delights of mental exchange, the great pervasive principle in human relations of "the law of duality".

Since the picture of the times in which Patience lives is fairly exhaustive, covering the gamut from the revivalist type in her guardians to the prima donna living as her manager's mistress, which is Rosita's ultimate fate, we shall have to concentrate in this brief sketch upon Patience's personal experiences alone. After all, she is the standard bearer which Gertrude Atherton has chosen to exemplify woman in search of the fullest development of her human nature.-- Disgusted as Patience is, then, with her knowledge of Rosita's compromise, she ponders the great question which confronts her at this stage of her life, her early twenties:

So far,<sup>f</sup> love in its higher sense-- if it possessed such a part-- she had seen nothing; of sensuality, too much . . . She recalled all the love stories she had read. Even the masters were insipid when they attempted to portray spiritual love. It was only when they got down to the congenial substratum of passion that they wrote of love with colour and fire. Was she to believe that it did not exist,-- this union of soul and mind? (pp. 148-9)

The ironical note, so often to be found in actual events, is sounded with Patience's falling in love and marrying one Beverly Peele, a handsome, spoiled young man with a brow that should be intellectual but isn't. The circumstances are particularly perverse, since Patience had in the first place conceived a contemptuous loathing for this man whose initial approach had been one of violent love-making. Beverly's sister, however,



that goes on growing, expanding in the consciousness of this  
and the delight of mental exchange, the great pervasive  
style in human relations of "the law of unity".

Since the history of the times in which we live is  
highly reflective, covering the great facts the revolution  
in our relations to the world living in our age's  
times, which is today's historic fact, we shall have to con-  
sider in this brief sketch of the historical experi-  
ence alone. After all, this is the standard between which  
progressive action has chosen to exemplify what is new in the  
future development of our world. -- Disregarding as  
is, that with our knowledge of nature's development, the progress  
the great question which confronts us at this stage of the

life, has nearly vanished.

So far, love in the human sense -- it is potential and  
real -- has been nothing of consequence. For such  
but provided all the love which the world has seen. For the  
love was limited and that is limited to the human mind. For  
it was only when they got down to the emotional and  
passion that they spoke of love with vision and life. Was the  
to believe that it did not exist, -- that vision of soul and  
which (pp. 147-5)

The historical hope, so often so far from actual reality, is  
revealed with historical reality in love and working out  
by force, a passionate, spiritual growth with a new kind of  
in the historical and future. The consciousness and growth  
however, these relations had in the first place involved a  
consciousness looking for this new world in the new world  
but not in the old. -- Reality's vision, however,



appeals for him to have a second chance, explaining that men "are not really so bad at heart-- they've been badly educated." (p.180) In this and other instances Mrs. Atherton seizes the cow, not the bull by the horns, and holds up to women their responsibility: if men don't know how to treat women decently, women must after all be in part, possibly in large part, to blame. --Feeling at least enlightened by the unpleasant encounter with Beverly's primal urge, Patience flatters herself she could not now "blunder into matrimony", which is the very thing she proceeds to do, marrying this man of the strong physical magnetism forthwith.

Now we are in for a history of miserable domestic disharmony, with Beverly drinking and raging out his displeasure at Patience's having any interest beyond his vacuous self. She reasons with him that in order to be happy together they must learn companionship-- a very new plea, understand-- and she promises to take up an interest in horses if on his side he will "try to like books". This happens to be a chapter out of Mrs. Atherton's own story,\* as she tells of giving her husband "Peveril of the Peak" to read, at which he studiously ploughed away a few pages daily, leaving the volume still uncompleted at his death! Alas, the scenes of temper, too, appear to have been done from the life. When Beverly complains that his wife does not love him, he undertakes to win her devotion back in this

\*"Adventures of a Novelist" by Gertrude Atherton. Liveright Inc., New York 1932.



appeals for him to have a second chance, explaining that he  
"was not really so bad as he was" -- that he was really educated.  
(p. 180) In this and other instances Mrs. Ashcroft makes the  
case, not the bill by the house, and holds up to women their  
possibilities. At the same time she is a great woman herself.  
Women must enter all in their power, possibly in their  
place. "Thinking we have not yet reached the point of  
suffrage with Beverly's father, I have written this letter  
to you and not to 'Beverly's father'." which is the very  
thing she proceeds to do, writing this one of the many  
last suggestion for change.

Now we are in for a history of the domestic of Beverly.  
With Beverly drinking and regaling with his disfigurement of Beverly's  
being any interest toward his father's side. The woman with  
him that is able to be happy together they have been together  
together -- a very new place, understanding -- and the prospect of  
come up as the best in houses it is his side as well as  
the best. This happens to be a chapter out of Mrs. Ashcroft's  
last one story, as she calls it, living her husband's story  
of the best to read, as which he is extremely thoughtful way  
few pages still, leaving the volume still uncompleted at his  
death. Also, the scene of the story, too, seems to have been  
done from the life. When Beverly explains that his side does  
not love him, the explanation is with her devotion back in this

"Adaptation of a Novel" by Gustave Ashcroft. New York 1900.



engaging manner:

He tore up and down the room, banging his fist alternately on the table, the mantel, and the books, and once he hit the panel of a door so heavy a blow that it sprang. Patience sat down and turned her back. Hal (Beverly's sister) endeavoured to stop him; but he had found a listener, and would discharge his mind of its accumulated virus. He told the tale of the winter in ~~the~~ spasmodic gusts, hung and fringed with oaths. Finally he flung himself out of the room, shouting all the way across the hall. (p. 230)

In Mrs. Atherton's case, George, who was "not a bad sort" when he wasn't crossed, she admits, is happily removed by an early death at sea. But Patience must fly in the face of convention by leaving her husband and undertaking to support herself through a newspaper career. To be sure, when Beverly is actually ill and asks her to come back she gives in and goes, on these novel terms; that he shall pay her what he would have to pay a nurse, and shall treat her in all ways accordingly. Once again we see how negligible a factor economically speaking the woman was, when she had to stoop to such bargains by way of achieving the most meagre recognition. Back again under the Peele roof, Patience finds herself being quizzed for justification of her independent course. Here Mrs. Atherton lets off some of her dynamite. Mr. Peele, the father-in-law, inquires:

"You ignore your duty to your husband; your marriage vows?"

"There is only one law for a woman to acknowledge, and that is her self-respect."

"The husband that loves you is entitled to no consideration?"

"Not when he exercises none himself. I refuse to admit that any human being has the right to control me unless I voluntarily submit myself to that control . . . a woman is a common







harlot who lives with a man that makes her curse the whole scheme of creation." (p. 326)

Anarchical, Mr. Peele concludes, and congratulates himself that he will not have to live among the women of the next generation. But Patience is quite content with the charge, since she is committed to that interpretation of anarchy which decrees the government of self by self, while Beverly's deficiency is exactly of this order. She is confident that women have the power to alter the intolerable conditions of their lives by the simple process of educating their sons to make a different world. Women, she concludes, "can do anything with the plastic mind". (p. 328) No small program to map out for womankind as early as the year 1897, and a significant anticipation of the statement by the psychologist, Menninger, in 1942, that woman is at "the center of the universe, psychologically".\*

Lest the history of Patience Sparhawk should appear too polemical, some passages of melodrama are now introduced. While Patience is attending the convalescent Beverly, poised as she is for flight back to the world of affairs, he quarrels with her over his sleeping potion of morphine and measures out the drops himself, with the result that he takes an overdose and dies. Patience is brought to trial for the murder of her husband, is convicted and actually in the death chamber before the testimony that can assure her innocence gets through.

"Love Against Hate" by Karl Menninger, M.D. Harcourt, Brace and Company. New York 1942. p. 41.



period the lines with a man that makes her think the whole  
system of oppression." (p. 108)

Accordingly, Mr. Davis concludes, and suggests that itself  
that he will not have to live about the room of the next year  
anxious. But this is a quite common with the same, since  
she is expected to that intervention of another which is  
the government of self by self, while society's delinquency is  
exactly of this order. She is confident that women have the  
power to alter the conditions of their lives by  
the simple process of choosing their own to have a different  
world. Women, she concludes, "can do anything with the physical  
world." (p. 108) No small power to say for the womanhood of  
today as the year 1907, and a significant indication of the  
statement in the newspaper, *Washington Post*, in 1906, that woman  
is the center of the universe, psychologically.

Then the history of fashion should agree to the  
which some changes of relations are now introduced. While  
fashion is changing the conventional dress, it is as if  
it is going back to the world of ideas, to the world of  
the new the changing notion of womanhood and womanhood out of  
from the past, with the result that he takes an interest in  
the. Fashion is brought on trial for the matter of the  
hand, as revealed and actually in the last chapter of the  
the fashion that we know has introduced into the world.

"Have you not seen" by Mrs. Davis, N.Y. 1906, p. 11.  
and company. New York 1906, p. 11.



Meanwhile the lawyer for the defense who has intermittently appeared throughout the book as the Stranger embodying Patience's ideal of a life companion, has fallen in love with her, and arrives just in time to bear her triumphantly from the yawning jaws of death.

The last few pages of the book are quaintly dated, especially the description of the mad race in a train engine to bring the acquitting evidence-- secured incidentally through the most romantic means of a priest who had heard the culprit's confession. The playing for effect here is very obvious, even Patience seems to be enjoying the sensation she creates. But the powerful grasp of the most explosive issues of the woman's world in those days before the turn of the century loses none of its value. Mrs. Atherton has given us the most exhaustive survey of these issues anywhere to be found within the covers of one book.

To follow Mrs. Atherton's analysis of the comparative satisfactions to be found in love and in unemotional intellectual activity, which is her theme in "Black Oxen"\* goes beyond the scope of this paper, restricted in emphasis as it is to the Victorian world of women in the United States. We may mention in passing, however, that the theme suggested in Patience's enjoyment of "sexless intellect" was carried through to an amazing allegory done in the modern manner in the person of Countess Zattiany of "Black Oxen". This woman who had lived

\*"Black Oxen" by Gertrude Atherton. Boni and Liveright. New York 1923.







very widely indeed, born in the United States, married in Europe and quite untrammelled by inhibitions or moral scruples in her adoption of the European woman's "cult of men", experiences a scientifically performed rejuvenation which restores her physical youth, allowing her mind nonetheless to remain stored with the knowledge gained from sixty-odd years of crowded living. Momentarily, on her return to New York she thinks she has recovered the illusion of happiness in love with a young newspaper man.

Now Gertrude Atherton presents her estimate of the hierarchy of values between youth, love and the intellect. The Countess, about to subscribe once again to the code of youth, finds herself confronted with a contemporary from Vienna, a statesman, who has been her lover in the past and who comes now, all romance aside, to ask her to marry him, to work in closest association with him in rebuilding the shattered postwar world in his homeland. She lends a reluctant ear to his arguments that love, however exalting, is "merely one more delusion of the senses . . . one of the imagination's most devilish tricks"\* whose sole purpose is to delude each generation into perpetuating its kind. After the age for love is over, this man persists, the proper aim of the gifted individual is power. Madame Zattiany meets this persuasion with half-formed convictions of her own as to the ephemeral and even sophomoric nature of passion, so returns to Vienna to undertake a vast scheme of social reconstruction more appropriate to a woman of her scope.

\* *ibid.* p. 320







A last note of that unconscious humor, for which Gertrude Atherton is unique, is sounded again with the defiant statement that the Countess certainly did not love the man she finally accepted for her husband. Love, she is convinced, is "slavery", and she is so thoroughly finished with it that she will marry no man except the one she does not love. The theme is a bit fantastic, as much of the book is fantastic, but as an example of how far the individualistic woman will go in campaigning for the freedom of the woman's mind, it serves as a final, and entertaining, challenge. "Black Oxen" on the whole is a highly imaginative, yet stimulating commentary on the ever-recurrent issues confronting women in any world, whether new or old.

\* \* \* \*

Men have a way of lamenting that women are never satisfied, they must always be wanting something else. There is probably some truth in the charge. If we have watched them, in the course of this paper, pursuing and achieving some definite objectives, we are haunted nonetheless with the presence of vague and disturbing aspirations which seem to elude the grasp. Eva Birdsong it was who admitted that what women value most "is something that doesn't exist. Nowhere. Not in any part of the world. Not in the universe."\* If such be the case, we may rest content in the knowledge that the vitally interesting

\*"The Sheltered Life" by Ellen Glasgow. Doubleday Doran, New York 1932. p. 366.



A last note of that unobtrusive humor, for which Galsworthy is famous, is sounded again with the delectable suggestion that the Cambridge certainly did get over the war, and that the love, she is convinced, is always and she is so characteristically related with it that she will never no man through the war and does not love. The theme is a bit fantastic, as much of the book is fantastic, but as an example of how the individualistic woman still is in organizing for the liberation of the woman's mind, it serves as a final, and an-entirely, original. "Black Oxen" on the whole is a highly imaginative, yet substantial commentary on the ever-recurring latent conflict which is any woman, whether new or old.

They have a way of lamenting that women are never satisfied. They must always be wanting something else. There is probably some truth in the charge. If we have noticed that, in the course of this paper, passing and achieving some definite conclusion, we are haunted continually with the presence of vague and disturbing suggestions which seem to elude the grasp. The Galsworthy is one who noticed that what women value most is something that doesn't exist. However, but in any part of the world. Not in the universe. If such be the case, we may rest content in the knowledge that the vitally interesting



quest will still go on.

There is some reason to question, however, if the novels of the present, or the immediate future, can achieve such dramatic value as those we have surveyed here. The Victorian was a formalized world imposing strict, even dangerously confining disciplines, and the problem of adjusting the human element to meet these standards is the very stuff of which drama is made. Even while the standards are being battered down the human interest persists, until that moment when a level is reached, and new conflicts must be discovered. The conflicts of modern literature appear to consist in the struggle against the elemental problems of life only: against poverty, against the physical violence which is war, even against psychological abnormalities. Since we have destroyed a world of complex values, we have taken necessarily to the crude stuff of life in the raw.

But elemental problems, just insofar as they are that and nothing more, are bound to become monotonous after a while, and I believe we shall look back more and more to those artists who had greater wealth and more delicate tissue to deal in. They will still be there as guideposts if we should ever get around to building up a more sophisticated and intellectually satisfying scheme of life once again,-- for a generation become disillusioned and restive under an absence of disciplines toward a clearly conceived and integrating end.

FINIS



quest will be to  
There is one reason for this, however, at the level of  
the present of the immediate future, and another, more remote,  
value of which we have already seen. The Victorian who is  
familiar with the history of the world, even in its most  
black and white, and the problem of education, the human element in  
most of our standards is the very heart of what is made.  
Even with the standards are being changed from the human  
interest, however, until first moment when a level is reached.  
and new questions must be answered. The conflict of modern  
life is the opposite to that in the struggle against the  
material elements of life only, against poverty, against the  
physical violence which is war, even against psychological  
exploitation. Since we have destroyed a world of complex  
values, we have taken responsibility to the entire staff of life  
in the new.  
The material problem, then, is that as they are first and  
nothing more, we turn to human elements of life and  
and I believe we shall find more and more to those who  
who are the most active and more delicate things to deal in.  
They will still be there as perhaps it is should even get  
around to dealing up a more sophisticated and intelligently  
existing system of life once again. -- For a generation before  
the world and passive world in a sense of discipline  
found a clearly conceived and integrating one.



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